SPARK

Bright Spots and Big Moments in Mapleton

Wednesday, Aug. 27, 2025

Welcome to **Spark! Bright Spots and Big Moments,** your biweekly roundup of feel-good stories, standout moments, and celebrations from around Mapleton. From student achievements to staff highlights, this community newsletter is all about what makes Mapleton shine.

Spark stories are organized by:

Bright Spots – shout-outs and recognitions
Big Moments – events, milestones, and celebrations
Behind the Spark – staff profiles or features
Community Connections –partnerships, family highlights
High Fives!

Share your good news!
Send a "High Five"!

Past issues of all our employee newsletters are available on our website.

Welcome Back, Mapleton!

Bright Spots

Explore PK-8 staff kicks off school year with spirit of service

Explore PK-8 staff kicked off their school year by making a difference in their community. On their very first day back, Tuesday, Aug. 5, more than 40 team members spent the morning volunteering at Food for Hope, a local nonprofit that provides nutritious food to families experiencing food insecurity.

The team spent the morning cleaning, sorting, and repackaging food at the nonprofit's Thornton warehouse, all in the spirit of their school-wide theme, "All Hands on Deck." The effort was the result of a leadership team reflection last spring.

"We were thinking we should start the year not necessarily thinking about ourselves, like getting into classrooms and getting everything set up, but taking a step back and thinking about what it looks like to have a spirit of service," said Explore Principal Micah Klaver.

Read the full story!

New cadet leadership takes command in Mapleton's top-ranked AFJROTC program

Mapleton's Air Force Junior ROTC program is launching the new school year with a strong cadet leadership team and momentum from its most successful year to date.

Cadet Lt. Col. Valeria H., a senior at Mapleton Early Career Prep, now leads the "Mapleton Raiders" squadron and a 10-member senior staff representing schools across the district. Students were selected for leadership based on their outstanding performance last year and potential to guide peers in areas like drill, fitness, fundraising, and community service.

The program is open to all Mapleton high school students and meets daily at the Vo-tech Center on the Skyview Campus. New students can join through Oct. 1 by contacting their school leadership.

Last year, Mapleton's cadets earned 16 drill competition trophies and earned the Distinguished Unit Award with Merit, one of the highest honors awarded by Air Force JROTC Headquarters.

Join us for a special ceremony honoring 9/11 and POW/MIA.
The Raider Squadron invites you to DiTirro Stadium on the Skyview Campus, ***Wednesday, Sept. 10, from 10–10:45 a.m.****, for their annual student-led ceremony. This meaningful event, organized entirely by students, will include participation from local law enforcement and members of all military branches.*

MEC Internship Coordinator named 2025 Junior Achievement Educator of the Year

Congratulations to Lisa Hollingsworth, Mapleton Early Career Prep's (MEC) Internship Coordinator, who was just named the 2025 JA Educator of the Year by Junior Achievement-Rocky Mountain (JA)!

The award recognizes an inspiring educator who brings the mission of Junior Achievement-Rocky Mountain into their school,

empowering students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to plan for their futures and make smart academic and economic choices.

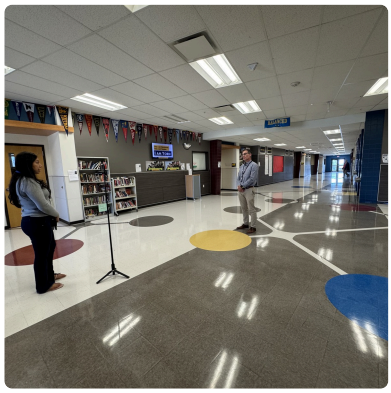
Hollingsworth was honored at the organization's annual open house event this past Saturday, Aug. 24, at the JA Free Enterprise Center, in Greenwood Village. Since 2015, she has incorporated JA's lessons into her curriculum, impacting more than 570 MEC students.

"I feel so lucky to be able to work with such a cool group of staff and students," Hollingsworth said. "I'm hoping through this programming, we grow confidence in our students because they deserve a bright future. With their academics and internships, they are among the best in Colorado."

Read the full story!

Big Moments

York International School honored for attendance



The Colorado Department of Education celebrated York International School this morning as a school that is truly *beating the odds* when it comes to student attendance.

Over the past three years, York has reduced its chronic absenteeism rate—the percentage of students missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason—by an impressive 7.68%.

As part of CDE's media briefing on the release of statewide attendance data, Principal Eriksen Van Etten and Assistant Principal Ben Schneider highlighted how York has built a positive, schoolwide culture around attendance. Every staff member understands their role in making York a welcoming place where students feel they belong and want to be every day. Attendance conversations are frequent, data-driven, and relationship-focused.

York also shared details about its Attendance Re-Focus group at the high school level, which helps uncover the root causes of unexcused absences and connects students and families with the resources they need to get to school—on time and every day.

Following the briefing, CBS News visited York to learn more about these innovative attendance efforts. The story will air this evening at 5 p.m.

MESA freshmen kick off high school on the ropes

On Wednesday, Aug. 13, incoming freshmen at Mapleton Expeditionary School of the Arts (MESA) headed to Genesee Mountain Park for a day of adventure and team-building at Denver Genesee Experiential, a ropes-based outdoor leadership course.

The annual trip, led in part by MESA's upperclassman Link Leaders, helps students launch high school with energy, laughter, and a strong sense of community. Throughout the day, freshmen played games, solved group challenges, and navigated the ropes course, all designed to stretch their comfort zones, spark new friendships, and inspire teamwork.

"The purpose of this field trip is to build community," said MESA Academic Support Coordinator Jared Powell. "Freshman year is a large predictor for overall high school success, and we want to start these students on the right path."

The day ended with trust built, teamwork strengthened, and a strong start to the school year.

Behind the Spark

Powering up for the new school year

While students were away for summer break, Mapleton's Information Technology team was hard at work preparing schools for a strong start to the new year. From replacing security cameras and organizing network closets to upgrading devices and operating systems, the team tackled dozens of behind-the-scenes projects to improve safety, reliability, and access.

They also prepared nearly 8,000 iPads and Chromebooks for reissue to students this fall, ensuring every learner has the tools they need on day one.

Their efforts help power classrooms across the district and remind us that technology, when cared for, is a tool for learning and opportunity.

Read the full story!

From Mapleton student to Dean of Culture

Gabby Hernandez walked into Mapleton as a seventh grader looking for belonging. Today, she's Global Intermediate Academy's first Dean of Culture, helping ensure every student feels seen, supported, and safe, just as she once did. Her journey from student to leader is a powerful story of resilience, connection, and coming full circle in the district she still calls home.

Learn how Gabby's experience as a Mapleton student led her back to the district—and how she's building a culture of trust, visibility, and care at GIA online.

This story is from our "Where is Mapleton?" series, stories about where we've been, where we are, what we're up to, and all the things that make Mapleton the only place you want to be. You can read more stories on our website.

Community Connections

Wish For Wheels brings a special delivery to Meadow

The nonprofit Wish for Wheels and Garney Construction brought an unforgettable surprise to Meadow Community School on Friday, Aug. 15, a brand-new bike and helmet for every second grader! More than 40 Garney volunteers assembled the bikes and personally delivered them to students, helping adjust helmets and seats before cheering them on as they took their first spins around the playground.

For some students, it was their very first bike, and the cheers from Garney staff, Meadow staff, and parents made the milestone even more special.

This heartwarming effort was part of Garney's community service initiative and reflects their commitment to giving back. Wish for Wheels is a nonprofit that provides bikes to children who might not otherwise have one. Thank you to both organizations for helping Meadow students start the year with confidence, excitement, and a whole lot of heart!

Mapleton receives 29 instruments from the organization Bringing Music to Life

Mapleton's Performing Arts Department has 29 more reasons to celebrate thanks to a generous donation from the Denver nonprofit Bringing Music to Life.

At a recent event at the University of Denver's Newman Center for the Performing Arts, the organization donated 29 beautifully refurbished instruments, including flutes, clarinets, saxophones, and guitars, as part of its annual statewide instrument drive.

With hundreds of students sharing instruments each year, donations like this help ensure all students who want to play can do so with confidence.

Mapleton's performing arts programs are open to all students in grades 6–12, regardless of which school they attend.

This marks the third consecutive year Mapleton has received this meaningful support.

High Fives!

"High Fives" are a quick and fun way to celebrate the people who make Mapleton shine. From kind gestures and creative ideas to everyday excellence, these shout-outs recognize those who go above and beyond and remind us of the many ways our community makes a difference.

If you know someone who deserves a "High Five", submit your appreciation using this form.

Ryan Fiore, Preschool on Poze
Ryan does his best every single day for the students, staff, and families at POP! He is one of the most positive and compassionate directors I have worked with. If you are lucky enough to know him, you can tell he is here because he cares. Thank you, Ryan!

Submitted by Stephanie Schupbach

Vanessa Turnbull, Talent Management
"She's been doing amazingly well holding down the fort without our second HR Rep. Taking on the extra load during such a busy time of year is no small feat, and she's managed it all with poise, composure, and a cool head. She's truly gone above and beyond, and it's clear she's been exercising impressive time management to keep everything running so smoothly. Really admirable."

Submitted by Anonymous

North Valley School for Young Adults Team
"I've been supporting the Welcome Center and have received nothing but kindness from everyone at North Valley. Each day, I'm greeted with friendly "good mornings," staff check in to see if I need anything since this isn't my usual location, and the words of encouragement have meant so much. Keith even went out of his way to get me a better chair so I'd be more comfortable. This is a truly kind and amazing team. We're lucky to have them!"

Submitted by Karina Kucherova

Operations Team, Martin Sanchez and Jeremy Cortez
"We would like to thank the Operations Team, especially Martin and Jeremy, for delivering curriculum to all of our schools. Thank you for always being so willing and helpful during a very busy time of year with the start of a new school year! Teaching and Learning appreciates all you do to help get materials to schools and in the hands of students!"

Submitted by Teaching and Learning

Mitch Sauer, Athletics
"I want to give a shoutout to Mitch for helping us out early on, during the setup of the new Welcome Center Table. We were setting up printed materials, flyers, Chromebooks, and so much more, and, unfortunately, we realized we forgot an extension cord to keep our laptops charged! Mitch ran down and let us borrow his. It really helped us out and we are so grateful!"

Submitted by Karina Kucherova

Martin Sanchez, Jeremy Cortez, and Jimmy Bath; Operations
"Mapleton's Warehouse team does fantastic work every fall to make sure that all sites get the supplies they need to operate. This includes food for the kitchens, desks and chairs for the classrooms, and any other vital items that our sites need. Thanks, guys, for all your hard work!!!"

Submitted by Al Piper

Ingrid Marin and Sarah Martinez, Talent Management
"Year after year, Ingrid and Sarah go above and beyond to help many of us navigate the paperwork for salary advancement. Even when unexpected issues or delays pop up—often leading to a flurry of urgent emails to HR—they handle everything with patience, care, and professionalism. Their support makes a stressful process so much smoother, and we're truly grateful for all they do."

Submitted by Kevin, Clayton Partnership School

Greg DeLong and Anthony Delilli, Operations
"These two team members did an outstanding job making repairs within the JROTC storage area. They are dedicated, enthusiastic, and Mapleton strong."

Submitted by Lt Col Bill Arrington

Zach Pearson and the entire Information Technology team
"Zach has taken on the impossible with Chromebook inventory management and made it not only possible but significantly easier! Everyone in IT works so hard, especially this time of year, and I want to say that we notice and we appreciate it!"

Submitted by Kelly Johnson

Integrated Services, Special Education Department
"A big high five for the Integrated Services team for their incredible responsiveness and ongoing support in our schools and across Mapleton. Thank you for going the extra mile!"

Submitted by Karla Gruenwald

Sean Chadwick and Alaina Fletcher, Information Technology
"Our entire IT team is amazing and responsive to the needs of our district! I want to specifically thank Sean and Alaina for their incredible support in partnering with me, guiding me, answering all of my questions, and supporting our teachers who need online curriculum access!"

Submitted by Veronica Shea

Tiffany Watson, Teaching and Learning
"Tiffany goes above and beyond to ensure schools receive the curriculum they need! She does everything from taking inventory to moving and unpacking boxes. She is responsive to the system, and she masterfully works with vendors to communicate urgency and timeliness in receiving resources. I am new to working with our curriculum, and have gained a totally new perspective as to the amount of work she does behind the scenes to get what our students and staff need as quickly as possible! "

Submitted by Veronica Shea

Laura Milani, Office of the Superintendent
I just want to take a moment to recognize how amazing Laura Milani is and all that she did to make our Opening Day so special! From the delicious breakfast to the beautiful balloons, the seamless organization, and even the bookmarks that had a QR code sticker that had to be placed on the back of each one (1000 to be exact 😉), every detail was perfect. Your hard work and creativity truly set the tone for a great day! Thank you for making everyone feel welcome!

Submitted by Anonymous

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Spark! Bright Spots and Big Moments – Call for Submissions

Do you have a bright spot or big moment to share? Email communications@mapleton.us, or call 303.853.1020 to share your ideas!

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