

Kalamazoo Public Schools

# EXCELSIOR

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October 2025 - Volume 28, Issue 9



## Greeting the School Year with Smiles

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**Etienne LeSuer** Is Making the NFL Team



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Busy Summer of Facilities Work Across the District



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# Supporting Students Through Conversation and Connection

## A Message from the Superintendent

Dr. Darrin Slade



**C**ONVERSATION is fundamental to education.

By conversations, I mean thoughtful communication between multiple parties. As educators we are in constant communication with each other at all levels. The Excelsior is an attempt to maintain a conversation with the community, so you have a sense of the work we are doing and the wonderful things our students are achieving. Part of my role as superintendent is to communicate with stakeholders about what our district needs to serve our students effectively.

As superintendent, I have worked diligently to have real, honest conversations with staff, students, parents and guardians, the Board of Education, and others in the community so we develop a shared vision of Kalamazoo Public Schools' goals and plans.

As we start a new school year, it is a

perfect opportunity for parents to think about the conversations that they want to have to both inspire and support learning for their children.

It is really a simple task to have a conversation with your child, and that daily interaction is so important. A good conversation with younger children can help them learn the power of words to describe their feelings, the environment around them, and the way the world works. For very young children, we know that the more words they hear in daily conversations, the more words they add to their vocabulary. Those auditory cues become the basis of their ability to express themselves and form the foundation of the literacy skills that are so important to their learning.

But, having meaningful conversations with your children is not simply about helping them develop skills that are necessary for success in school. Taking a few minutes to talk about your day, or their friends, or the way the car wash works, or how their grandmother is feeling since she's come home from the hospital helps children know that using their words is a valid way

to process their thoughts and feelings.

These conversations provide parents a chance to listen thoughtfully and to discover the wonderful ways their children's minds work. It allows you to validate their feelings, show empathy for the things they are discovering about themselves and others, and promote honest discussion about your relationship. Having a heartfelt conversation with your child is one of the most powerful ways to build your relationship by showing how much you value what they have to say, who they are, and what they have to contribute to the world.

There is another key conversation that I hope all parents take time to cultivate this year, and that is the conversation between you and your child's school. KPS has a wonderful tool to help develop that communication: MyPowerHub (which some may be familiar with as the former Power-

School Parent Portal).

This tool is available this year as both an updated website and app, which can be downloaded from your favorite app store.

With MyPowerHub, guardians can access a student's schedule, grades, attendance records, and GPA. They will also find it an easy and useful way to fill out school forms, send emails to school staff, and receive notifications about important school dates and events. New to the platform this year is a two-way messaging system that allows for instant messaging between teachers and staff and parents and guardians. It provides a safe place for sharing information, and it can even provide real-time translation services.

If you have not explored this valuable tool, I encourage you to visit the website or download the app. It will enhance your ability to keep in touch with school staff, support your child's educational journey, and connect with the district about important information.

Let's get talking about ways to help our children and ensure that they have the best school year possible.



Find information at [kalamazoopublicschools.com](https://www.kalamazoopublicschools.com) under the technology department tab.

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# Learn About Opportunities Available through Academically Talented Youth Program

**M**IDDLE SCHOOLERS seeking to challenge themselves in math or English while engaging with other motivated students and tackling advanced materials are encouraged to attend an informational meeting about the Academically Talented Youth Program (ATYP).

ATYP, which is accessible to students through the Western Michigan University's Office of Pre-College Programming, offers advanced and accelerated classes in math and English for students beginning in seventh or eighth grade.

Students can enroll in ATYP after receiving qualifying scores on an entrance exam or through a portfolio process. Testing takes place in the winter and spring.



**Jahnvi Marion and Maya Van Heest, who were Linden Grove students in 2024, attended ATYP. During one class, they attempted to use a simple straight edge to draw an equilateral triangle.**

year. Families are encouraged to attend an informational meeting to learn more about the program.

Presentations will be held from mid-October through mid-November. KPS parents may want to attend the session planned at Western Michigan University at 4 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 9, in Sangren Hall. But families are welcome to attend a presentation at any other location. A virtual presentation date will also be available. The complete dates, times, and locations of the meetings will be listed on the ATYP website at [www.wmich.edu/precollege/atyp/qualifying](http://www.wmich.edu/precollege/atyp/qualifying).

ATYP also offers an AP Computer Science A class that is available to any student who has completed Algebra I. No minimum test score is required for this class. APCS teaches students programming skills and analytical thinking by using multimedia labs in the Java programming language.

Starting the next fall, admitted students come to the WMU campus one or two afternoons a week to attend class with other middle schoolers from throughout southwestern Michigan. Tuition is paid for by the public schools, with families paying a per-semester registration fee that is waived for those who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Sixth- and seventh-grade students will receive a letter or email from the ATYP office encouraging them to test for qualification for the 2026-27 school

**Please visit [wmich.edu/precollege/atyp](http://wmich.edu/precollege/atyp) for more information about the program, or feel free to contact the office by email at [atyp-info@wmich.edu](mailto:atyp-info@wmich.edu) or by phone at (269) 387-3553.**



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# ARTISTS' CORNER

While the Artists' Corner waits for the art programs to get up and running this school year, we are highlighting the talents of one of our art teachers.

This fall, **Erin Brott** is starting her second year as an elementary school art teacher with KPS. She teaches at Woods Lake Elementary: A Magnet Center for the Arts.

"Outside of teaching art, I am also a practicing artist, and I paint a lot in my free time. A lot of my paintings over the past few years have focused on nature and how meditation and mindfulness play an important part in my art and life."



*Florescence*  
by Erin Brott

*Inhale-Exhale*  
by Erin Brott



*Treading Lightly*  
by Erin Brott  
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**Recipe**

from the KPS Food Service, Chartwells

Josh Kerby,  
executive chef



Kirsten Strong,  
registered dietitian  
nutritionist

**Smashed Potato Dippers with Homemade Chip Dip**

**T**HERE'S nothing quite like the feeling of a crisp autumn day in Michigan, and this recipe captures that cozy, comfortable vibe perfectly. Inspired by the state's generous potato harvest, this dish is a delicious way to celebrate the season. Whether you're using up the last of a big bag of potatoes or picking up a new one just for this recipe, you'll love how this simple dish brings friends and family together.

*(Makes about 7 servings)*



**INGREDIENTS**

**Potatoes**

- 1 ½ pounds baby Yukon Gold potatoes or other small round potatoes, (about 24)
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ¼ teaspoon smoked paprika
- Olive oil for drizzling

**Dip**

- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup mayonnaise (can be light)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1 teaspoon dried dill
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper

**INSTRUCTIONS**

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Place the potatoes in a pot and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil and cook until potatoes are fork tender, but not falling apart, about 10-15 minutes.
- 2.** In the meantime, add all your dip ingredients to a medium-sized bowl and mix well. Set aside.
- 3.** Drain potatoes well and place on a parchment-lined

baking sheet. Using the bottom of a glass, gently press down on each potato until smashed. (Lightly grease the bottom of the glass to keep the potatoes from sticking.) Drizzle a little olive oil over each potato and sprinkle with the spice mixture. Bake for 20-30 minutes or until crisp on the outside. Serve immediately with the dip.

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## Etienne LeSuer's Goal Was Making the Team, Not Playing the Game

**E**TIENNE LESUER was not an athlete in high school, but that didn't stop him from pursuing his dream of working in professional sports.

LeSuer, 24, says he always knew he enjoyed sports, but it wasn't until college that he began to build the skills necessary to land his dream job — with the National Football League.

Since joining the NFL as an event operations associate in 2024, he has worked the Super Bowl, the NFL Draft, and on a game in Brazil to expand the NFL's global brand.



**Etienne LeSuer, Loy Norrix, class of 2019**

LeSuer grew up in Kalamazoo, starting his education in Kalamazoo Public Schools at Winchell Elementary School, before moving to Milwood Magnet School and graduating from Loy Norrix High School in 2019. After high school, he enrolled in Western Michigan University, where he majored in marketing and found a way to turn his “niche interest into a career in sports and business.”

“My mindset in college was that I just wanted to get my foot in the door. I wanted to find something to put on my resume once I graduated,” he said.



**Etienne LeSuer on the field at the Super Bowl LIX in New Orleans.**

“Obviously, you're not going to start off at the top,” he said. He started working in the WMU Athletic Department office. He served as a student liaison for

visiting teams, helping get locker rooms ready, arranging parking, and helping the visiting coaching staff with anything they needed on game day.

Even though he wasn't playing sports, he said he approached the job with a team mentality.

“I have a competitive nature. I liked just being able to be on a team and to be part of something that is more than yourself. Having a team attitude applies to more than just sports,” LeSuer said.

It was an attitude that he got from his father Craig LeSuer, who played basketball in college and is the principal of Milwood Elementary School. His mother Nina LeSuer is the KPS coordinator of English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Library Services.

“They have given me constant support throughout the journey. Even during Covid, when I was wondering what I was going to do post-graduation and what I would do if things didn't work out in grad school,” he said. “They supported me and pushed me to be the best version of myself. I could not have done it without them.”

After graduating from WMU in 2023, he enrolled in graduate school at Louisiana State University. “I didn't need a graduate degree, but I felt it would

*(continued on page 7)*



**This year LeSuer's operations team helped run the NFL draft in Pittsburgh.**

## Etienne LeSuer (cont. from page 6)

put me that much more ahead in terms of education and experience. Both of my parents have master's degrees and it was a big influence."

Before heading to LSU, he started searching for a job in team operations or game operations. So, by the time he started school, he also started a part-time job with the New Orleans Saints' training camp. By the fall, the job had turned into a full-time internship in the Saints' ticketing department.

When he graduated from LSU in 2024, he landed his job at the NFL.

"[Landing the job] was definitely a combination of education along with the experiences that I had gathered," he said. "I turned my experiences into talking points in the interview process. I could explain that I know how an organization runs, how events run. I've done XYZ. On top of that, I have my master's degree. I think that set myself apart."

His first assignment with the NFL: Super Bowl LIX, which was held in Louisiana.

"I've been going to that building since I was a toddler. My first experience in the (Caesars) Superdome was with my grandfather. I grew up a Saints fan. To be a part of something so important, in that building, was like a dream come true," LeSuer said.

It was the longest day of his life, he says, starting at 2 a.m. handing out credentials to all of the staff, then heading over to the stadium to work the entrance on Poydras Street.

"I remember when the gates opened and you're standing out on the street with 10,000 people speed-walking or running toward you. Seeing the excitement on people's faces, nothing compares to that as a sports fan."

This year, he moved to New York to continue his work with the NFL. His work team's assignment shifted to handling the NFL draft in Pittsburgh in April. Along the way, he also traveled to Brazil to help handle one of the NFL's first international games designed to help spread the NFL brand.

LeSuer has this advice for current KPS students: "Find your interest early and do your research in terms of what kind of careers you can make of it. If you would have told me in high school that you can make a career out of sports — besides playing sports — I probably wouldn't have believed you."

"If you like sports, volunteer for something as simple as running the scoreboard at basketball games. Once you get to college, you can take that and run with it."

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# First Day of School!



Ayaan Rukundo wanted mom Anitha Nyirakayenzi to pose with him on the first day at Woods Lake.



Luke Bunn goes for a high, high five with Woods Lake behavior specialist Irving Smith on the first day of school.



Lianna Garcia-Salas is ready for the new school year at Woodward School.



Twins Aquavious and Aquavion Brown are double the smiles on the first day of school at Woods Lake.



Nataly De-Leon and her sister Sarai Bernal are ready to greet the new school year with smiles at Milwood Magnet.



Vee Nguyen and Armani Pompey are ready for senior year fun at Kalamazoo Central.



Suliman Alsamra gives a thumbs up the first day at Milwood Magnet.

**ON THE COVER:**

Amiya Brooks, Honesty Abrams, and Alayah Brooks share nervous excitement for the start of the school year at Woods Lake.



Teacher Katie Kelly welcomes Isabella Ford and Jimena Virula-Gonzalez to Woodward School on the first day.



Archer Yonkers, is a big man on campus at Woodward School.



Woods Lake first day excitement swirls around principal Sierra Prather.

**First Day of School!** (continued from page 9)



Woodward Principal Frank Rocco helps, from left, Tiffany Moore, JuDah Donaldson, and Levi Griffin find their classes for the first day of school.



Campus Safety Officer Bobby Wilson works one of the new weapon detectors at Kalamazoo Central High School on the first day of school.

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# Busy Summer of Facilities Work Across the District

**T**HIS SUMMER Kalamazoo Public Schools undertook several major facilities projects. Work moved ahead on the new district kitchen off of Ninth Street on the site of the old Chime Elementary. Several buildings received upgrades such as the new roof

at Woodward School and the new lockers for Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts. South Westnedge, which is used to temporarily house schools when they are undergoing construction or renovation, received a major facelift itself with a new, secure

entrance and other improvements. The district is grateful for the support of the community, which has allowed these projects to move forward through the approval of its bond requests.

*(more photos on page 13)*



The district's South Westnedge building received several upgrades this summer, including a new secure entrance.



The new district kitchen on the west side of Kalamazoo quickly took shape over the summer.



Steven Ray Jr. works on a window panel as part of this year's summer paint crew at Spring Valley Center for Exploration.



Over the summer, new lockers were installed in the 600 wing of Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts.



Dreon Smith and the facilities staff deep cleaned Milwood Magnet School over the summer.



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Korea Ray and the summer paint crew gave a new coat of paint to several schools, including Spring Valley Center for Exploration.

## Busy Summer of Facilities Work *(continued from page 12)*



Day custodian Karen Pigeon and the maintenance crew at Milwood Magnet put in long hours working on cleaning the school this summer.



Clifton "C.J." Washington paints around a door at Spring Valley Center for Exploration as part of the summer paint crew.



The Lincoln International Studies School library was remodeled this summer. Upgrades included new carpet, furniture and ceiling tiles.

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# INSPIRE Helping Teachers Expand Science Learning for Youngest Students

**A** TEAM of Kalamazoo Public Schools early elementary teachers spent part of their summer learning new ways to integrate science concepts into their classrooms.

The teachers participated in the training through the Western Michigan University INSPIRE program, which stands for Integrated Network of STEM Partnerships Investing in Resources for Equity. The program aims to provide high-quality STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) experiences for young children, especially those who have been traditionally underrepresented in such activities.

WMU is working with KPS, Comstock Public Schools, area community centers and local science organizations to expand STEM education in the greater Kalamazoo area.

Meredith Reinhart, assistant professor of Teaching, Learning and Educational Services at WMU, coordinates the program and said INSPIRE attacks the issue on three fronts: family STEM engagement through monthly events with community partners, professional development for PreK to third grade teachers, and opportunities for WMU students to



**Lincoln International Studies School first-grade teacher Kelley Lenehan and Emily Brack, a King-Westwood Elementary first-grade teacher, work in a sandbox to show how students might use engineering principles to build a dam.**

work with the program as volunteers at the community events and as interns in the INSPIRE classrooms.

“The primary goal of the program is to increase the use of inquiry-based science methods in early

childhood classrooms in order to spark children’s interest and curiosity in science,” Reinhart said. “Many early childhood teachers find it difficult to incorporate science inquiry into their instruction for a variety of reasons.”

Some of those barriers include a curricular focus on math and language arts that can make it difficult to “find time” for science, a lack of content knowledge, a lack of confidence about science concepts, or limited resources and supplies.

The professional development that took place at WMU this summer introduced teachers to concepts in physical science, earth and space, and life sciences. Teachers also learned hands-on activities and received supplies to use in experiments.

“INSPIRE is predicated on inquiry-based methods, encouraging children to experience those ‘I wonder why’ moments that spark an investigation,” she said.

During the professional development, teachers created inquiry-based lesson plans that aligned with their current curriculum.

*(continued on page 15)*



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## INSPIRE Helping Teachers *(continued from page 14)*

This is the second year for the program, which is funded through a \$500,000 Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity grant. The program launched last year with monthly outings that connected families with science-related community resources. More than 1,800 families were provided free access to STEM events at WMU and community partners such as the Kalamazoo Nature Center, Kalamazoo Valley Museum, Air Zoo, Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery, and Critchlow Alligator Sanctuary.

Woodward School first-grade teacher Dana Calloway, who is one of the teacher leaders for the program, said the monthly outings were a wonderful way to introduce families to resources they may not have been aware of.

"INSPIRE allows more hands-on science experiences for families to explore together. It also allows them to see what different organizations in the community have to offer such as the Kalamazoo Valley (Community College) Food Innovation Center, Air Zoo, Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery, and the alligator sanctuary," Calloway said. "In my classroom, I was able to provide students with different ways to explore the sci-

ence concepts we were learning.

"I believe not only does this program help me to become a better teacher while learning science concepts, but it also allows me to connect with various teachers in the area and collaborate together. I have



**Prairie Ridge kindergarten teacher Deanna Roland and Woodward School first-grade teacher Dana Calloway examine data during one of their INSPIRE STEM classes.**

also learned so much from the community partners."

The program also offers online contests with monthly prizes, including books, STEM-related materials, and memberships to science organizations.

Lincoln International Studies School PEEP teacher Jody Johnson used INSPIRE last year, and she said it not only expanded STEM learning in the classroom, but helped teachers build relationships with students and families outside of the school.

In class, students explored the color spectrum and used magnets to study concepts of force and motion. But outside of school, students and their families were able to explore community activities that can be expensive and hard to access.

"There is a huge need for the program," Johnson said. "Science adds so much to the school experience by introducing hands-on experiments, new vocabulary, and social emotional learning. The workshop helped me introduce additional science methods into the curriculum while still teaching to the standards. It made learning more hands-on, so students could get more meaning out of learning and find the joy of science."

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# WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE



**NEW EXHIBIT** SEPT. 27, 2025 - JAN. 4, 2026 | FREE

## DANCING WITH LIFE: MEXICAN MASKS



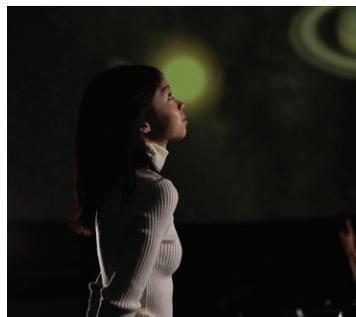
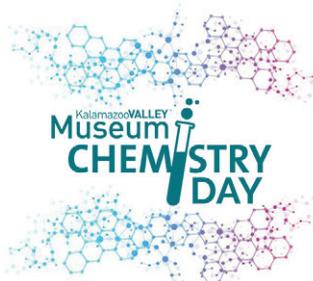
Explore the rich festival culture of Mexico through historic and contemporary masks from the collection of the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture.

*Dancing with Life: Mexican Masks* was curated by Dr. Pavel Shlossberg and organized by Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, Spokane, WA. Its tour is organized by International Arts & Artists, Washington, D.C.

**EVENT** SATURDAY, OCT. 18 | NOON - 4 P.M. | FREE

## CHEMISTRY DAY: THE HIDDEN LIFE OF SPICES

Explore the chemistry of spices through fun experiments. Free seeds will be given away, so you can continue the joy of the science of spices in your own garden!



## PLANETARIUM ANNOUNCEMENT

The planetarium is currently under renovation. Visit [kalamazoomuseum.org](http://kalamazoomuseum.org) for the latest information on upcoming showtimes.

**EVENT** FRIDAY, OCT. 31 | FREE

## MUSEUM MAYHEM FOR PRE-K



Enjoy Halloween-themed hands-on craft activities and storytimes, plus the spooktacular Puking Pumpkins science demo that teaches about acids and bases!

**EVENT** TUESDAYS, NOW - NOV. 18  
6:30 - 7:30 P.M. | FREE

## THE HONORABLE HARVEST LECTURE SERIES

Enjoy weekly talks this fall examining ways we can restore the tenets of reciprocity with the natural world as



a community and as individuals. In partnership with the museum, this drop-in lecture series is held at Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Marilyn J. Schlack Culinary and Allied Health Building, located at 418 E. Walnut St. in downtown Kalamazoo. View the list of topics at [valleyhub.kvcc.edu/events](http://valleyhub.kvcc.edu/events).

**NEW EXHIBIT** OCT. 12, 2025 - JAN. 4, 2026 | FREE

## "AM I AN AMERICAN OR AM I NOT?"



This traveling exhibition asks visitors to think about examples of unfair treatment from our country's past and present in order to protect the American promises of life, liberty and justice for all.

*"Am I An American or Am I Not?"* was developed by the Fred T. Korematsu Institute, Exhibit Envoy and AGH Arts Strategies.

**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.*



230 N. Rose St., Kalamazoo  
[kalamazoomuseum.org](http://kalamazoomuseum.org) | 269.373.7990