

Kalamazoo Public Schools

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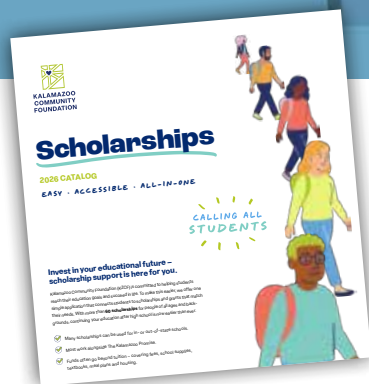
January 2026 - Volume 29, Issue 1



The Promise Turns 20

PLUS: A special insert on scholarships from the Kalamazoo Community Foundation

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Kalamazoo Public Schools, 1220 Howard St., Kalamazoo, MI 49008

The Kalamazoo Promise: A Gift There for the Taking

A Message from the Superintendent

Dr. Darrin Slade



EVERY CHILD who lives in the Kalamazoo Public Schools district and attends KPS from kindergarten through 12th grade has a savings account potentially worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Students, think of that: There are tens of thousands of dollars — in some cases up to \$70,000 or \$80,000 — with your name on it. Every day you show up to school, every test you study for, every opportunity you take to excel, every AP class on your schedule — all of that is part of the work that builds the investment. You worked for it. You simply have to decide that you are going to use it.

The money is in the form of The Kalamazoo Promise, a scholarship that can be used to pursue your dreams. To not utilize The Promise is to throw away tens

of thousands of dollars that someone wants to invest in you.

The question is do you want to use The Promise and invest in your own future?

The Kalamazoo Promise scholarship offers 100 percent of tuition and mandatory fees for post-secondary education in Michigan to every student in Kalamazoo Public schools who resides within the boundaries of the district and graduates after attending KPS from kindergarten through 12th grade. The scholarship is calculated based on a student's years in the district, but even those who attend at least four years of high school in KPS can earn 65 percent of their college tuition.

Parents, we all know that adults like to play this game of "What if?" It goes like this, "What if you won the lottery? What would you do?" I am telling you that your family, your children have won the lottery. I have worked in districts with other smart and deserving children whose potential languishes because they do not have the funds to attend college, or ex-

plore a trade school, or earn a degree or certificate at a community college.

Sometimes, I fear our students do not understand the immensity of this anonymous gift. Having come to Kalamazoo only three years ago, I am still in awe of the gift. In all honesty, I do not believe I will ever lose my overwhelming sense of gratitude to the anonymous donors who have funded this scholarship in perpetuity and made a commitment to KPS students, to equity, and to our community.

I am also grateful to the teachers and staff who work tirelessly to ensure our students have the knowledge, skills, and social-emotional intelligence to take advantage of The Promise. This community deserves its kudos for the energy that it has poured into support services, extracurricular activities, enrichment programs and financial resources to support our schools and students. Everyone is working to make sure The Promise is not just a scholarship, but a way of life and education for our students.

The Promise is celebrating its 20th anniversary — and to date it has awarded more than \$242 million in scholarships to almost 9,000 KPS students. Think of that, almost a quarter of a billion dollars invested in our youth and their potential. It has allowed some students who never thought they could go to college to graduate with a degree. It has given some students the chance to graduate from college debt-free — no easy feat these days.

Students are unlikely to encounter another situation where someone has set aside a gift of this magnitude just for them. They may find kind and supportive people in this world who will give them a chance, provide opportunities and encourage them to succeed, but few — if any — will have the ability to invest actual dollars in their dreams.

Now, students, all that is left is for you to reach out and take advantage of this amazing gift — and to show your gratitude by becoming the best possible version of yourself.

PICTURE YOURSELF HERE

kvcc.edu/register



LEARN MORE ABOUT KATLYN

Kalamazoo**VALLEY**
community college



KATLYN C. I. COMPUTER INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Promise Effects Change for Individual Students, Entire Community

By Von Washington Jr., CEO The Kalamazoo Promise

Adapted from *Seeding Hope: Two Decades of Promise Stories*

THE KALAMAZOO PROMISE is a shining example of how philanthropy can truly transform the lives of individuals and communities. By investing in human potential through education and working alongside Kalamazoo Public Schools, The Kalamazoo Promise has not only provided financial support to students but instilled hope and a sense of possibility for their future. Made possible by anonymous donors, this place-based scholarship is a stunning gift to our community.

The generosity behind The Kalamazoo Promise cannot be overstated. Donors have contributed millions of dollars to open doors of post-secondary opportunity for thousands of students. Yet, The Promise is much more than a scholarship. It represents a long-term belief in the value of education and the potential of every student. That belief has instilled hope, created opportunity, and reshaped the aspirations of an entire community, powerfully demonstrating the impact that selfless, place-based philanthropy can have on a community.

The success of The Promise has depended on a broad coalition of partners — and The Promise ecosystem shows what's possible when a community wraps its support around its young people.

The Kalamazoo Promise, serving as an unwavering reminder of the importance of education, has had a tangible impact on students. Students are more likely to strive for academic excellence and take advantage of opportunities that can help them achieve their goals. This increased motivation can result in higher grades, higher test scores, and overall success in school. With financial barriers lifted by the scholarship, many students who might not otherwise have considered it have pursued higher education.

The Kalamazoo Promise has had a ripple effect across the community. It has helped attract families and businesses to the area, stimulated economic growth, and supported the creation of a more educated workforce. Many students have returned to Kalamazoo after graduation, contributing to the local economy and civic life.

By promoting a culture of educational attainment within the schools and the community and emphasizing the importance of post-secondary education, The Kalamazoo Promise encourages students to pursue higher education as a means

of achieving personal and professional success. This effort not only benefits students but contributes to the overall growth and development of the community. The program has helped break down socio-economic barriers by providing equal access to higher education for all students, thus promoting social mobility and reducing income inequality.

Understanding success in place-based initiatives requires nuance. Some critics question the effectiveness of these initiatives. For some, if 100 percent of the students are not graduating, using the scholarship, and receiving degrees or certificates, the effort is perceived as a failure.

But, success must be viewed through a long-term lens. Place-based initiatives take time to show significant results. And, success must be measured in multiple ways, including: foundational shifts in educational access, long-term impact on communities, and stories of students whose lives are forever changed. Real change happens one student at a time.

Another measure of success can be the level of community involvement in the initiative, which ensures the program is addressing the most pressing needs of the community and fostering a sense of ownership and pride among residents. Clear and measurable goals that align with the program's mission and community identified issues and involve all community members help create a more inclusive and fair community and allows success to be tracked over time.

Place-based scholarships can help overcome socioeconomic barriers by offering universal access to higher education. Such access promotes diversity, inclusion, and upward mobility, and proves how these scholarships can be valuable tools in promoting educational equity.

But, scholarships alone cannot solve systemic disparities. It is crucial that policy makers not only to invest in place-based scholarships but also to implement policies that ensure equitable funding and resources for all schools. These policies include providing adequate resources, advanced curriculum materials, and modern facilities for all students, regardless of their ZIP code.

The Kalamazoo Promise is not just a scholarship program; it's a movement seeded by hope and a promise. It is imperative that we continue to prioritize and support this and other place-based initiatives to create a brighter future for our youth and society. Let us work toward building a world where every student has an equal opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential.



Von Washington Jr.,
CEO The Kalamazoo
Promise



Helping Daniel Henry through Uncertainty, Loss

WHEN THE Kalamazoo Promise was first announced, I was a 6-year-old kid in Kalamazoo's Northside neighborhood trying to make sense of a world that often felt mystifying and unpredictable. What I remember most was the sense of possibility that suddenly settled over all of us on the Northside. For so many families in my community, including mine, college had always felt like a distant dream, something you hoped for but weren't sure you could ever afford. Overnight, The Promise changed that. I didn't fully understand the magnitude of that gift at the time, but I knew it was something important. Through my time at KPS, a college-going culture was always championed, and I don't think many school communities in the United States could say that.

As I got older, The Promise became more than a scholarship, it became a source of stability and direction during a period of my life filled with uncertainty and loss. After losing both of my parents and my grandmother, The Promise was one of the few things I could count on. It allowed me to attend Kalamazoo College, study computer science, and ultimately discover a path to becoming a patent attorney in Chicago. Without the financial burden of tuition, I had the freedom to explore opportunities, take risks, and focus on becoming the best version of myself. The Promise didn't just make college possible, it made advanced post-graduate study and education feasible.

Looking back now, as an attorney mentoring students and working to expand access to STEM and intellectual property careers, I see just how deeply The Promise shaped not only my life but the lives of my classmates. It signaled to all of us, regardless of neighborhood, income, or circumstance, that we were worthy of investment and uplifting. It showed us that the community believed in our potential long before we believed in it ourselves. Twenty years later, that belief continues to ripple outward through every career, every achievement, and every young person who dares to imagine a future brighter than their present. For that, I will always be grateful. Thank you, Kalamazoo Promise!



KC alum Daniel Henry is now an attorney.



Gary Start: Remembering the Financial Impact for KPS

SINCE MICHIGAN school districts are heavily reliant on the state's per-student foundation allowance for revenue, The Kalamazoo Promise has made a tremendous difference in the programs and services that Kalamazoo Public Schools can offer.

Prior to The Kalamazoo Promise, Kalamazoo Public Schools' enrollment was decreasing at rates averaging about 300 students per year. The foundation allowance at that time was approximately \$7,000 per student. Therefore, those decreases resulted in around \$21 million of annual revenue loss. Those losses necessitated significant cuts to programs and services, annually, to balance the budget.

However, in the first fiscal year of The Kalamazoo Promise (2006-2007), the district's enrollment grew by more than 1,000 students. That growth generated additional revenue in excess of \$7 million in the first year alone. Enrollment continued to grow in future years, which put Kalamazoo Public Schools in a favorable financial position when compared to most other Michigan school districts.

Without The Kalamazoo Promise, major annual budget cuts would continue to have been required. Instead, the district has been able to invest in opportunities for students that would otherwise not have been possible.

Gary Start



Gary Start retired from KPS in 2021 after 37 years with the district. Through his career, he served as co-director, director, and assistant superintendent of business and finance, deputy superintendent for business, communication and operations, and interim superintendent.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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KPS SUPERINTENDENT

Dr. Darrin Slade

Excelsior is mailed to every household in Kalamazoo.

For information about advertising, please call Encore Publications. (269) 383-4433

NOTICE

Kalamazoo Public Schools welcomes all students and staff of any religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy, gender identification, height, weight, familial status, marital status, sexual orientation, and disability.

The District will not tolerate or condone any act of bias or discrimination toward any person on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy, gender identification, height, weight, familial status, marital status, sexual orientation, and disability in any of its activities, hiring practices, programs or services.

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

Director of School Improvement, Title I and Assessments

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

All other inquiries should be directed to:

Director of Human Resources
Kalamazoo Public Schools
1220 Howard St.
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(269) 337-0177

District Directory at:
www.kalamazoopublicschools.com

Recipe

from the KPS Food Service, Chartwells

Josh Kerby,
executive chef



Kirsten Strong,
registered dietitian
nutritionist

Classic Chicken Noodle Soup with Homemade Stock

THE BEAUTY of stock is its flexibility. It can be customized using a wide variety of vegetables, herbs, and spices. While this recipe provides a solid foundation, feel free to adjust the ingredients based on what you have available. The process is simple and forgiving.



STOCK
makes about 2 quarts

Ingredients

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 rotisserie chicken carcass | 2 celery ribs, roughly chopped |
| 3 quarts water | 2-3 bay leaves |
| ½ large onion, quartered | 2 garlic cloves, roughly chopped |
| 2 carrots, scrubbed and roughly chopped | 10 peppercorns |
| | 5-6 parsley stems |
| | Salt and pepper to taste |



Preparation

- Place all ingredients into a large pot. If you choose, you can put the peppercorns, garlic, bay leaves, and parsley stems in a cheesecloth pouch, but it's not necessary.
- Bring to a boil, then turn down to a simmer.

Simmer for 20 minutes to 2 hours.

- Remove solids with a slotted spoon or colander.
- Add salt and pepper to taste. Use right away or freeze for later. You will be using 2 quarts for the chicken noodle soup.

CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

makes about 3 quarts

Ingredients

- 2-3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 celery ribs, diced
- 2 medium carrots, diced
- ½ medium onion, diced
- 2-3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 quarts of stock
- 4 ounces (half a bag) kluski (dumpling) noodles (Mrs. Weiss brand available at most grocery stores.)
- Meat of 1 rotisserie chicken or about 1½ pounds of cooked chicken, cut into bite-size pieces
- Salt and pepper to taste

Preparation

- Bring your stock to a boil in a large stock pot.
- Heat vegetable oil in a large saute pan over medium-high heat. Saute garlic, onions, carrots, and celery until mostly tender. This should take 7 to 10 minutes.
- Once your stock is boiling, add the noodles. Cook noodles for 4 to 5 minutes or until *al dente*.
- Next, add your veggies and chicken. Let soup simmer for about 10 minutes.
- Season as needed with salt and pepper. Enjoy!

Frank Rocco Feels Impact of Promise as Principal and a Parent

I HEARD about The Promise announcement during my first year teaching at Woodward School. My sister-in-law texted saying, “Wow! Isn’t this great!” I was clueless. I had no idea what she was talking about. I taught the rest of the day and learned all about it that evening.

Once I realized and understood what it meant, my first thought was, “Will it last until my son graduates?” James was just a year old at the time.

My second son, Jason, came around a few years later and they both eventually started school.

Both boys had a wonderful experience in KPS starting at Woodward, going to Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts, and then graduating from Loy Norrix High School. KPS was able to provide the foundation they needed to be successful at the college level.

Now, I am the principal of Woodward School, and both of my sons are at Michigan State University using The Promise. James is a junior. Jason is a freshman. James interned the past two summers through the Higher Promise, a program that places Promise scholars in authentic learning experiences in their fields of interest. Last summer, he was an intern at The Promise. One of the best feelings is getting the tuition statements, seeing the full cost of the semester, then seeing what The Promise covered. It’s a life-changing scholarship program, and I am proud to be a part of the district that helps to provide this opportunity to so many students.



James Rocco



Jason Rocco



Frank Rocco,
principal,
Woodward School

Promise Inspires Aaron Dickason II to Make the Most of Education

MY NAME is Aaron Dickason II. The Kalamazoo Promise has been a part of my story for as long as I can remember, even if I didn’t fully appreciate it at first.

When I was a freshman at Kalamazoo Central, I was more focused on sports than school. Basketball and track were my world, and I didn’t always give my grades the attention they needed. It wasn’t until my parents sat me down and reminded me that The Promise could pay my tuition — but only if I earned the grades. That shifted something. I started to see The Promise not just as a scholarship, but as an opportunity I couldn’t afford to waste.

As I grew older, The Promise became a source of motivation. It pushed me to take my education seriously, to see beyond day-to-day high school life, and to imagine bigger possibilities for myself. I didn’t want to be someone who took a life-changing gift for granted. Knowing that college could really be within reach made me work harder, and it gave me something to dream toward: getting to college, growing, and eventually making it out of Kalamazoo to create a different future for myself and my family.

Because of that mindset, I went on to attend Michigan State University, where I ran track and founded Men of Action Mentoring, an organization focused on leadership, service, and support for young men of color. Today, I’m an entrepreneur, a dreamer, and someone still chasing big goals. None of that would’ve happened without the foundation and confidence The Kalamazoo Promise gave me. It showed me what was possible, and it continues to inspire the way I move, work, and give back to the community that helped shape me.

I currently serve as the program assistant for the Black Arts & Cultural Center, where I have the opportunity to support local artists, uplift Black voices, and give back to the community that helped shape me. Alongside this work, I’m preparing to launch my own business, Cryo Mobile Recovery. Cryo Mobile Recovery is an innovative mobile wellness service offering whole body cryotherapy, NormaTec compression therapy, and Theragun massage therapy — bringing accessible recovery and wellness directly to events, businesses, gyms, and homes.



Aaron Dickason II works at the Black Arts & Cultural Center and is preparing to launch a wellness business.

Mya Schulz Pays It Forward, Helping Young Promise Scholars

THE KALAMAZOO Promise provided me with a great foundation, directly enabling my professional journey. Graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in behavioral psychology from Western Michigan University in 2022 was a direct result of the financial security The Promise provided.

By alleviating the burden of tuition debt, I could dedicate myself fully to my studies and graduate ready to enter the workforce. This opportunity has fueled my current role as a career coach at KRESA, where I work with youth, many of whom are current Kalamazoo Public Schools students and Promise scholars.

Now, as we mark the 20th anniversary of The Promise, I see its impact not just on my own life, but on the lives of young people I coach every day. My work focuses on helping these youth overcome barriers to employ-

ment. College tuition is a large barrier for many students. Knowing firsthand the value of this resource allows me to connect with my students and counsel them with deeper understanding. I am more knowledgeable of the academic and career resources available, helping them transition from high school graduation to college and beyond.

The Promise is more than a scholarship; it's an ecosystem of opportunity that encourages education, removes financial stress, and prepares a workforce that is deeply invested in the local community. The scholarship's effects ripple out far beyond the individual recipient. For my family, The Promise provided security, knowing that a significant life goal was within reach. For the community, it fosters a culture where educational attainment is the norm — not the exception. My professional life is a testament to The Promise's success. It enabled my education, and now I get to pay that forward by helping the next generation realize their own potential, reinforcing the cycle of support and achievement that The Promise has established over the last two decades.



Mylesha (Crim) Schulz graduated from Kalamazoo Central in 2016 and from Western Michigan University in 2022.

For Families

Critchlow Alligator Encounters

Saturday, January 3

Community Rooms

10:30-11:30 am | EAS/Comm. Room

1-2 pm | OSH/Comm. Room

Get an up close, personal encounter with reptiles from our friends at the Critchlow Alligator Sanctuary. **Registration required for OSH event.**

First Saturday with Promise to Read

Saturday, January 3

10:30 am-12 pm | CEN/Van Deusen

Calling all students, families, and community members who want to develop a strong foundation of literacy. Each month will feature experts, books, hands-on learning, fun, prizes, and more.

For Teens

Beaded Axolotls

Monday, January 5

4-5 pm | EAS

Y2K is back, but with axolotls! Come create a beaded axolotl with us. **While supplies last.**

League of Extraordinary Explorers

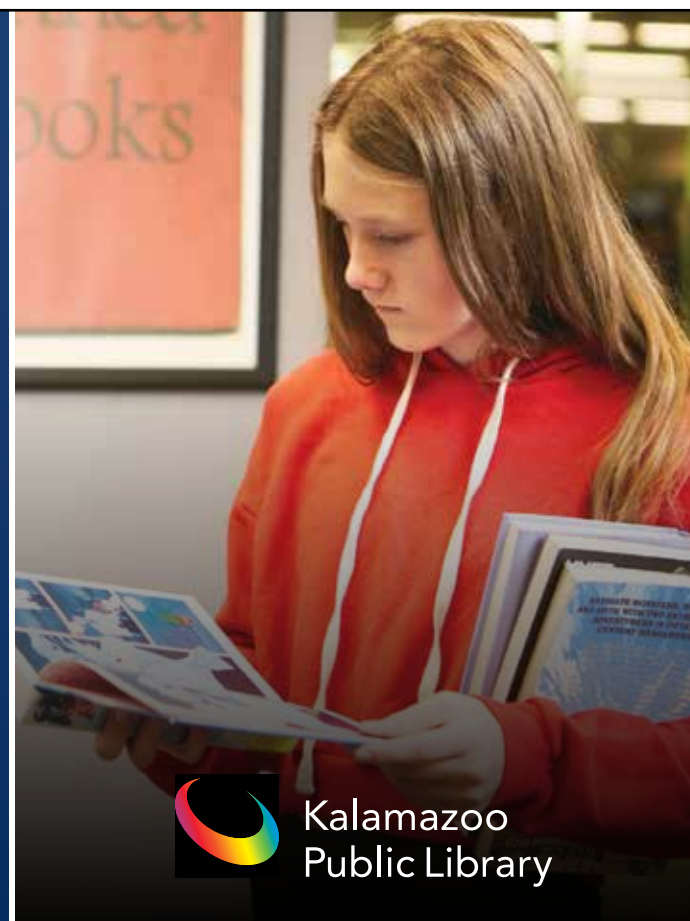
Thursday, January 22

6-7:30 pm | CEN/Teen Studio

Welcome, adventurers! Join our *Dungeons & Dragons* league and embark on a campaign to save the worlds of Wizard Coast.

All skill levels welcome. Grades 6-12.

Learn more and register online:
kpl.gov/events



**Kalamazoo
Public Library**



KALAMAZOO RESA

Career Connect

OPEN HOUSE

Tuesday, February 10, 2026
5:00-7:30 p.m.
at the Career Connect Campus
3500 Vanrick Dr., Kalamazoo, MI 49001

Kalamazoo County high school students and families are invited to discover the many free educational opportunities available to them at the Career Connect Open House.

GET CAREER CONNECTED AND EXPLORE THE FOLLOWING CLASSES & PROGRAMS:

- ▶ **Career & Technical Education (CTE)**
Hands-on career preparation courses to develop skills and earn credentials
- ▶ **Education for the Arts (EFA)**
Arts-intensive courses in theater, dance, visual arts and more
- ▶ **Early/Middle College (EMC)**
Dual-enrollment with KVCC to earn a certificate or an associate degree during high school
- ▶ **Career Pathway Planning Programs**
Learn about career development services, internships and programs to explore the world of work



Questions? Visit kresa.org/apply or call (269) 250-9300 to learn more.

In the event of weather-related cancellation, makeup date is Thursday, February 12, 2026.



KALAMAZOO
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

Scholarships

2026 CATALOG

EASY · ACCESSIBLE · ALL-IN-ONE

CALLING ALL
STUDENTS

Invest in your educational future – scholarship support is here for you.

Kalamazoo Community Foundation (KZCF) is committed to helping students reach their education goals and succeed in life. To make this easier, we offer one simple application that connects students to scholarships and grants that match their needs. With more than **60 scholarships** for people of all ages and backgrounds, continuing your education after high school is now easier than ever.

- ✓ Many scholarships can be used for in- or out-of-state schools.
- ✓ Most work alongside The Kalamazoo Promise.
- ✓ Funds often go beyond tuition – covering fees, school supplies, textbooks, meal plans and housing.



Scholarships at a Glance

Get started with our 60-in-one all access application

LOGIN

Once you're on the site, either log in to an existing account or create a new one.

FILL OUT

Complete the application. You don't have to finish it all in one sitting, you can save your progress and exit anytime.*

SCAN

Starting December 1, use the QR code below to access the site, or go to bit.ly/kzcf scholarships2026.

SUBMIT

Don't delay! Your application must be sent no later than 11:59 p.m. EST on March 1, 2026.



**Applicants are required to complete the FAFSA and provide their Student Aid Index (SAI) when completing our application.*

KPS Graduates

CIS/Kalamazoo Public Education Foundation Scholarship **A B M**

Mildred McConkey Memorial Scholarship **A B ST**

Duane Roberts Scholarship **A B ST F PT**

Mary Ruth Robinson Scholarship **A B ST M F PT**

Peter and Inez Schonveld Scholarship **A B ST G F PT**

STEM

Aldrich Focus on Science Scholarship **A B G F PT**

Kalamazoo Science Foundation Scholarship **A B M F**

William T. Nuyen Scholarship **B M F**

Ronald F. Shepard Memorial Scholarship **A B M F PT**

Arts

Dominic and Barbara Court Family Arts Scholarship **A B G M PT**

Brady and Patrick Gallagher Memorial Scholarship **A B ST M**

Ann N. MacGregor Scholarship **A B G**

Melissa Wroblewski Memorial Scholarship **A B PT**

Athletics

Bob Block Memorial Scholarship **A B ST**

Roy G. Walters Memorial Scholarship **A B ST F**

Junior Golf Fund Scholarship **B**

Evelyn Prince Memorial Scholarship **B M**

Glen C. Smith, Jr./KCC Caddie Scholarship **A B ST M PT**

Brian Thiele Memorial Scholarship **A B ST**

Matthew VanderSalm Memorial Scholarship **A B PT**

Curtis and Dorothy Young Scholarship **A B PT**

General

Bhargava Family Scholarship **A B M**

Ronald C. Cavanaugh Memorial Scholarship **B PT**

Dominic and Barbara Court Family Scholarship **G PT**

Covert Township Community Foundation Scholarship **A B ST M F PT**

Nancy C. Niles Donovan Scholarship **G F PT**

Enhancement Ministries Scholarship **A B G PT**

Frank and Hildegard Goodrich Family Scholarship **B G**

Benjamin and Cherie Gubin Scholarship **G F**

High on Heroes Scholarship **A B ST G M PT**

Jean Hunse Scholarship **B F PT**

Derek Jeter Scholarship **A B M**

Kalamazoo Public Library Amanda Green Scholarship **G M PT**

Kreager Family Scholarship **A B ST F PT**

David and Barbara Kruse Paw Paw Public High School Scholarship **A B ST PT**

S. Rudolph Light Medical Education Scholarship **G F PT**

David and Priscilla Morris Scholarship **B G F PT**

Montague Myers Scholarship **A B G M F PT**

Clarence L. Remynse Scholarship **B M F**

Mary Roe Memorial Scholarship **B M**

Dr. Jack and Charlene Sauer Scholarship **A B ST M F**

Leon A., Donald J. and Jean K. Schau Scholarship **A B ST G M F PT**

Danial and Joeanna Smith Scholarship **B F**

William R. Steers Kalamazoo Scholarship **B**

George K. and Lois D. Stegman Scholarship **A B ST M F PT**

Jim Strehlow Scholarship **A ST M PT**

Wade and Clio Van Valkenburg Scholarship **A B ST F PT**



FEATURES & CRITERIA

A

Associate Degree

B

Bachelor's Degree

ST

Skilled Trades Eligible

G

Graduate Degree

M

Multiyear Award

F

Financial Need Required

PT

Part-Time Enrollment Eligible

Full details for each scholarship can be found online at kzcf.org/scholarships.

Weber Specialties Company
Scholarship

A B F P T

Welch's/National Grape Cooperative
Scholarship

**A B S T
M**

Myra P. Whalen Scholarship

G M F

Woodruff Memorial Scholarship

B

E. Earl Wright Scholarship

A S T M

Wright Coating Company Scholarship

A B S T

Earl Haas Scholarship

**A B S T
F P T**

Earl Haas Hackett Catholic Prep
Scholarship

A B M

John Charles Volderauer Scholarship

A B G P T

Jerry A. and M. Christine Walker
Scholarship

**A B S T
M F P T**

Emergency Scholarships to the *Rescue*

Did you know that KZCF offers urgent funding for unexpected education costs as they arise anytime of year? Our emergency scholarships are available to any Kalamazoo County residents. Funding is awarded swiftly, and requests can be made with a brief online application. To learn more, head over to [kzcf.info/EmergencyScholarship!](https://www.kzcf.org/EmergencyScholarship)

SCHOLARSHIP QUESTIONS?

To learn more about scholarships
or for help with your application,
email us at scholarships@kzcf.org
or call 269.381.4416.



Make an Impact – Give Today



You can support students in your community by making a gift to our Love Where You Live and Emergency Scholarship Funds or by creating a Scholarship Fund of your own! You can give whichever way works best for you:

DONATE ONLINE

Head to [KZCF.org](https://www.kzcf.org) and click on the Give Now option.

MAIL A CHECK

Kalamazoo Community Foundation
402 E Michigan Avenue
Kalamazoo, MI 49007-388

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE

EVENT DEC. 20, 23, 27, 28 & JAN. 3 | 1 - 3 p.m. | FREE

WINTER BREAK: CREATIVE CULTURE



Join us at the museum this winter break for Creative Culture, a series of FREE hands-on art activities for kids! Each program explores world traditions through creativity. Children will design masks, create textile-inspired art, tell stories through symbols and imagine mythical creatures from around the globe. All activities are drop-in, family-friendly and free!

EVENT FRIDAY, JAN. 16 | 1:30 - 2:30 p.m. | FREE

ILLUSTRATED MUSE(INGS)

Step into an afternoon of creation at Illustrated Muse(ings) — a gathering of artists creating in real time. Listen to a live musician or watch a live dancer and draw whatever moves you. No pressure, just good vibes. More information can be found at kalamazoomuseum.org/events.



NEW EXHIBIT JAN. 24 - JULY 26, 2026 | FREE

BLACK COWBOYS: AN AMERICAN STORY

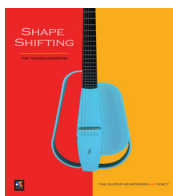


This traveling exhibition invites visitors to explore the lives and work of the numerous Black men, women and children — enslaved and free — who labored on ranches and participated in cattle drives from before the Civil War through the turn of the 20th century.

Black Cowboys: An American Story was developed by the Witte Museum, San Antonio (WitteMuseum.org). The exhibition is presented by Bank of America and generously supported by the John L. Santikos Charitable Fund of the San Antonio Area Foundation, H-E-B and Ed Rachal Foundation.

NEW EXHIBIT JAN. 24 - APRIL 26, 2026 | FREE

SHAPE SHIFTING: THE GUITAR AS MODERN ARTIFACT



This new exhibit presents 40 instruments that embody the art of the guitar, displaying it as both an instrument and as a physical canvas for artists and builders.

"SHAPE SHIFTING: The GUITAR As Modern ARTifact" is a Touring Exhibition of The National GUITAR Museum.

LAST CHANCE TO SEE NOW - JAN. 4, 2026 | FREE

DANCING WITH LIFE: MEXICAN MASKS



Explore the rich festival culture of Mexico through historic and contemporary masks. The exhibition centers around the work of the mask makers and dancers themselves through written and recorded interviews, including bilingual Spanish and English texts.

Dancing with Life: Mexican Masks was curated and organized by Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture and is toured by International Arts & Artists, Washington, D.C.

LAST CHANCE TO SEE NOW - 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.

PLANETARIUM EXPERIENCE | JAN. SHOWS | \$3 PER PERSON

Visit kalamazoomuseum.org for details.

ONE WORLD, ONE SKY:

BIG BIRD'S ADVENTURE | 11 A.M. SAT. | 30 MIN. | PRE-K - GRADE 1

Join Big Bird, Elmo and their Chinese friend, Hu Hu Zhu, exploring the sky they share. Discover the Big Dipper and North Star, and take an imaginary trip to the moon.

POLARIS | 1 P.M. SUN. | 29 MIN. | GRADES 3 & UP

Follow the adventures of a penguin and polar bear who use the scientific method and build a unique spaceship to investigate ice, the seasons and the planets.

THE SKY ABOVE US | 2 P.M. FRI., SAT. & SUN. | 35 MIN. | GRADES 4 & UP

Discover the "celestial wonders" that can be seen overhead in Michigan in this live, season-focused show.

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

SPECIAL NOTICE: The museum will be closed Dec. 24 - 26 and Dec. 30 - Jan. 2.

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.

Promise Is a Family Affair for the Wards

THE KALAMAZOO PROMISE was introduced at a time when many school districts were cutting budgets and laying off teachers. As educators and parents, we were both excited to hear about this new opportunity that could have a positive effect on our family! At the time, our oldest daughter was 3 years old, and we were expecting our second daughter. Initially, it was hard to believe that our daughters could have their entire tuition paid for. We also wondered, when the money would run out, because they were both very young at the time; but we soon learned that The Kalamazoo Promise was here to stay.

People were traveling from all over to bring their children to Kalamazoo for the guarantee of free college tuition. For us, it gave us reassurance of our children's future, while also offering us a sense of job security as teachers in the Kalamazoo Public



School district. Our dream of having our children graduate from college debt-free had become a reality.

Both of our children have received great benefits from attending Kalamazoo Public Schools. They had many opportunities in the district from elementary through high school to participate in honors courses, sports, and art programs. They were both accepted into all of the colleges they applied for, and ultimately chose our family's alma mater, Western Michigan University.

After graduating from Kalamazoo Public Schools, internships in local companies through the Higher Promise program were offered to them. As students at WMU, our daughters were able to attend events on campus that offered coaching platforms for students to ask questions about funding. The Promise connected them with coaches and mentors who helped them along the way.

As parents, The Kalamazoo Promise was our motivation to raise our family in Kalamazoo and enroll them in the district that we were currently working in to give them the gift of free college tuition. As teachers, we motivate our students each year to graduate from high school and to accept this wonderful gift that has already been paid for them. We deeply appreciate the donors, coaches, and staff who give support in such meaningful ways, and who pave the way for students to receive The Kalamazoo Promise scholarship!

Thank you,
Atiba and Cherise Ward
Proud Kalamazoo Promise Family

Atiba Ward, left, is a teacher at Loy Norrix, and Cherise Ward, right, is a climate and culture coach for KPS. Their daughters Aliah and Sierra Ward used The Kalamazoo Promise.

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7:00 pm
Friday - 1/16 & Saturday - 1/17
at Kalamazoo Central Auditorium
Adult tickets: \$6 | Student tickets: \$4
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Promise Scholar Elizabeth Boyd Helps Future Scholars Fulfill Their Dreams

FROM A VERY young age I was told I would be able to go to college for free. As a kid, that was a hard thing to wrap my head around, and I didn't know the full depth of that gift until I was a lot older. However, what that little girl was always thinking about was the opportunity that was fully in front of her. I could go to college and I could dream BIG! Little did that girl know that she would be sitting at her desk writing this, after a long day of teaching, in the very district helping teach the next generation of KPS students that will receive The Promise.

I am beyond grateful and blessed to have had the opportunity to be a student in KPS, use The Kalamazoo Promise, and now, as a teacher, be able to tell my students about how invaluable this gift is.

Getting to college, and college itself, had its challenges, for sure. I'm a very slow learner who took a lot of time and energy to understand what I was learning throughout my K-12 career. I graduated from Kalamazoo Central in 2020 and unfortunately lost half of my senior year to Covid. Then, having to start and complete most of my college career during Covid wasn't ideal.

However, The Kalamazoo Promise was

one of the constants of stability that kept me motivated during those times due to the fact that I knew I had such a gift to use. I still had an amazing college experience. Not having to worry about where my next tuition payment would come from helped me immensely by allowing me to focus on my schooling and doing the best I could do to become who I am today.

What I've realized since stepping into the role as a teacher in this district is that KPS has a HUGE heart and that heart makes this district unique. You see that heart in the appreciation of diversity, the meaningful connections that have been made between students and teachers, the educational opportunities of not just The Promise but the educational pathways such as Advanced Placement courses and Career & Technical Education, the students who want to learn more and more, the community that comes and supports consistently, and the staff members that show up each and every day.

The Promise just makes that heart beat more lively every day. I see that in my students. They light up whenever I mention The Kalamazoo Promise. I can see those dreams being made as they ponder and think BIG about what the future holds. They have a hunger for learning that I see daily. They want to make a difference in the world, and boy am I excited to see what this next generation of Promise scholars will do with their gift of The Kalamazoo Promise.

Thank you Kalamazoo Public Schools and The Kalamazoo Promise.



Elizabeth Boyd graduated from Kalamazoo Central in 2020 and then Calvin University in 2024. She is a Kindergarten teacher at Milwood Elementary School.



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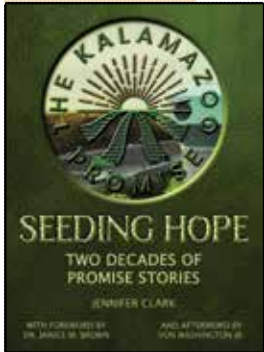
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Jennifer Clark Captures The Promise Story

From her Substack: Writing Without a Net

THREE YEARS AGO I said, “Yes,” when Von Washington Jr., CEO of The Kalamazoo Promise, asked me to write a book to help The Kalamazoo Promise celebrate its 20th anniversary. The Kalamazoo Promise, a scholarship funded by anonymous donors for graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools, covers up to 100 percent tuition and mandatory fees at more than 60 eligible Michigan institutions from colleges and universities to trade schools and vocational programs.



Twenty Years Ago

In November of 2005, I was four months pregnant when the birth of The Kalamazoo Promise was announced by Dr. Janice Brown, then-superintendent of Kalamazoo Public Schools. Anonymous donors, Brown said, had promised to fund this scholarship *in perpetuity*. Seriously? I couldn't wrap my brain around that word: *perpetuity*. Surely, I thought, *18 years from now, when my own kid will be graduating high school, the scholarship won't be around anymore.*

My second thought was this: *Somebody should do a documentary about this Promise thing. It's an incredible gift for our com-*

*munity and someone needs to capture its impact. I imagined a documentarian following these kids around to find out how they use or don't use their Promise. What obstacles must they overcome along the way in using their Promise? What is it they plan to do with their one wild and precious life?**

Flash Forward to Now

The Kalamazoo Promise, as promised, is still here. And that baby who had been kicking inside me? He's a Promise Scholar in his junior year of college.

In addition, a documentary of sorts, has finally been made. It's one you can hold in your hands. Bursting with inspiring Promise stories and beautiful color images, this 408-page hardcover book explores the history of this transformative program and shows how saying “Yes” to The Promise has impacted the lives of students and the Kalamazoo community over its first two decades.

In *Seeding Hope: Two Decades of Promise Stories*, we explore the unique paths young people take upon graduating high school. We discover obstacles they've faced, meet people who've helped them along the way, and learn how these scholars and alumni see this gift of free tuition as transformative, not only for themselves, but for their community.

** This sentence references the Mary Oliver poem “The Summer Day.”*



Jennifer Clark, author

Seeding Hope is available at Kazoo Books and this is a bookstore.

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Where Art Speaks

Join us for **Creative Café**, our weekly radio segment and podcast where local creators, performers and Arts Council members drop in to share the moments, muses, and ideas shaping their work. Plus we'll spotlight upcoming events that are lighting up Southwest Michigan's arts scene.

Grab your favorite mug and settle in!



KalamazooArts.org

ARTISTS' CORNER

Northglade Montessori Magnet School artists have been busy studying several artists and techniques with teacher **Christine Brege**.



Josephine Braford and other third graders made self portraits in oil pastel after studying Amedeo Modigliani and his unique way of creating portraits with elongated features.



Tilly Standish and other Northglade third graders have been studying the works of Wayne Thiebaud and his cake paintings. They learned how to make a 3-D cake design come to life and then created a fancy symmetrical cake stand with shadows.



Isaiah Brautigam and other Northglade kindergarteners were also inspired by Wayne Thiebaud and his fun bubblegum machine paintings. They worked on their cutting skills and decorated their machines to be unique.



Aaron Daniel Pimentel and the E2 (4-5th grade) students learned about Dia de los Muertos and created skulls using the repousee (metal tooling) process. They finished their artwork using cut paper designs.



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

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Paging Veterinarian Dr. Joanna Yiu

JOANNA YIU had decided her career trajectory by the time she finished kindergarten.

"I was lucky enough to know that I wanted to be a veterinarian from a very young age. My family tells me I was around 5 years old when I had learned about veterinarians and had decided that I wanted to be one," said Yiu, 27. "My grandmother was a NICU/pediatrics nurse, so she would encourage me to play with gauze, bandages, and stethoscopes. And, I absolutely loved animals, as most children do."

With her family's continuous support, years of hard work, and the gift of The Kalamazoo Promise, Yiu is now Dr. Joanna Yiu, a small animal veterinarian at Belvoir Pet Hospital in Cleveland, where on any given day she could be performing surgeries or dental procedures, cleaning wounds, deciding which diagnostics to perform, interpreting bloodwork, performing x-rays and ultrasounds, prescribing medications, and researching diseases.

Although much of her practice focuses on cats and dogs, in veterinary school she gained experience working with exotic species such as rabbits, birds, reptiles, and fish, and hopes to begin incorporating those species into her practice.

As a student, she attended Winchell Elementary, Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts and Loy Norrix High School. Her memorable teachers included AP biology teacher Alison Nelson, Latin teacher Barbara Felkel, Peace Jam advisor Sveri Stromsta May, and elementary art teacher Kathy Murphy.

"One of the most impactful lessons from my time at KPS happened in first grade art class. I had messed up my dinosaur drawing. I started to quietly panic but called Mrs. Murphy over. She told me, 'There are no mistakes in art, you simply make it into something else,'" Yiu said. "She used my accidental marker lines to draw a cloud in the sky, which was such a simple solution."

"This taught me that things do not always go according to plan, but everything will be okay. She taught me to change my mindset,



Loy Norrix alum and veterinarian Joanna Yiu poses with some of her various animal patients.



be flexible, and adapt to any situation. I have always been fairly quiet and anxious. Remembering this lesson has actually helped me tremendously, especially during the extreme stresses of veterinary school."

After graduating from Loy Norrix High School in 2016, she earned her bachelor's degree from the Michigan State University Lyman Briggs College in 2020, and her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Veterinary Medicine in 2024.

Were there things that you did in middle school and high school to prepare for a career in veterinary medicine?

I took as many science courses as I could, like biology and chemistry. AP courses are especially important to take, as they can give you college credits and make you a better candidate during the application process for veterinary school. I also worked really hard in school to keep good grades.

I took the KRESA program for Veterinary Science which, at the time, included a semester of classroom learning followed by a semester-long internship at a local clinic. For me, this was Friendship Animal Hospital. I also participated in the regional HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America) competition, and won the gold medal in the Veterinary Science division.

I also got experience with animals. I attended vet appointments with my parents for our family pets, volunteered at an alpaca farm in Schoolcraft, and participated in summer programs that involved animals.

What is the course of study like for a veterinarian?

The paths for vet school and medical school are very similar. You take the necessary pre-requisite courses in undergrad, then you apply to veterinary school. Most people obtain their full bachelor's degree, but some just take the pre-requisites (which takes about three years) then apply. You attend veterinary school for about four years.

The classroom/lab portion involved high-level anatomy and physiology courses of multiple species, pathophysiology of diseases, pharmacology, and hands-on courses with dogs, cats, cattle, horses, rabbits, turtles, and more.

The clinical rotations portion of vet school involved spending multiple weeks in each department

(continued on page 19)

Joanna Yiu (continued from page 18)

of the school veterinary hospital. This allowed me time to focus on one body system at a time (for example, neurology) and hone my skills in that area. I also spent multiple weeks at various clinics/hospitals in the United States, which exposed me to different ways that medicine can be practiced. Medicine is an art form that requires extensive knowledge, good instincts, adaptability, and collaboration.

During my externship at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, I worked with sea otters both at the aquarium and in the wild. I assisted with a research project regarding the local otter population. Otters are adorable from afar, but incredibly strong and dangerous up close. I helped sedate wild-caught otters, take measurements on them, collect blood samples, and release them back to their homes.

What is the one thing people don't understand or should understand about veterinarians?

A lot of people think veterinarians "play with puppies and kittens all day." You might be surprised by how many people say this to us. But veterinarians



are advocates for those that can't speak. Primary care vets are simultaneously radiologists, dermatologists, dentists, anesthesiologists, surgeons, oncologists, cardiologists, epidemiologists, ophthalmologists, clinical pathologists, and oftentimes, we are therapists for our clients, too.

What is your advice for a student who thinks they want to be a veterinarian?

Get some experience in the field. Call or email

local clinics to shadow for a day. Work as a kennel assistant, volunteer at an animal shelter, or go on farm-calls with a large animal vet. You may even get some experience in vet medicine and then realize it's not the field for you. That's okay. It's worth the try. There is a lot of freedom in veterinary medicine. Veterinarians can work anywhere: private practice, veterinary hospitals, farms, wildlife rehabilitation, zoos, aquariums, medical laboratories, government, animal shelters, research. There is also diversity in the animals you can treat. Think of literally any animal species in the entire world (except humans), and veterinarians can treat them. There is a place for everyone in veterinary medicine.

Finally...


Every student should use The Kalamazoo Promise. It is an incredible gift and resource. Make the most of your time in college, have fun learning new things, and explore different topics. Find the field that is best for you. There is no rush to know exactly what you want to do.

The Air Zoo's 5th Annual
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Make a commitment this new year to giving your family the opportunities to **learn, grow, and thrive** through the YMCA with a family membership that will put confidence in their steps and smiles on their faces.

THROUGH FUN PROGRAMS FOR KIDS

The Y offers programs and classes for all ages and abilities to learn new skills, develop positive self-esteem, and establish healthy lifestyles. From the classic swim lessons, day camps, Y-ball, and dance classes, to gymnastics, fencing, and disc golf, to name a few, there's something for every child and family!

The Y is dedicated to Youth Development and Healthy Living, where our expert staff is ready to support your family's Healthy Living journey.

THROUGH EXERCISE OPTIONS FOR ADULTS

There's not just stuff for the kids, though. With the Kids Zone (our onsite childcare), state-of-the-art cardio and strength equipment, walking/running tracks, tennis, racquetball, pickleball courts, and over 140 weekly, free-to-member group exercise classes, you'll have plenty to do while your kids have fun, too.

THROUGH NEW CONNECTIONS

The Y is a community that welcomes everyone and provides a safe space for friendships to grow and thrive.

FIND YOUR JOY!

Explore what the Y has to offer and find the things that bring you closer together for a better, healthier you.



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