

RIDING TO EXCELLENCE!

We're proud of Coach Martin and the gritty Ionia Equestrian Team for representing us and exemplifying our core values of growth mindset, respect, integrity, teamwork, pride, and community. The fall season was a tremendous success; we captured 1st place in our Division at Districts and earned a spot at Regionals for the second consecutive year. This achievement marks the first time since 1997 that the Ionia Equestrian Team qualified for Regionals in back-to-back seasons! The team consisted of six Ionia High School (IHS) students and their equine partners: Carleigh Thompson and *Fargo*, Addyson Lepien and *Heart/Birdie*, Teddy Sprank and *Dexter*, Cora Nummer and *PJ/Grady*, Fiona Sizemore and *Lizzie*, and Audrey Sprank and *Rosie*. Our gritty team earned many awards this season. *Continued on page 2*



IHS student Teddy Sprank & *Dexter*



Above left: IHS student Fiona Sizemore & *Lizzie*
Above right: IHS student Audrey Sprank & *Rosie*

BULLDOG BEGINNINGS PRESCHOOL!



Our Bulldog Beginnings Preschool provides a free, fun, high-quality education for 4-year-olds. Our caring team is fully licensed and highly trained. Please call 616-527-4900 to sign up or for more information.



The EXCEL is the official publication of the Ionia Public Schools (IPS). Copies are available in the IPS Central Office and on our website at www.ioniaschools.org.



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UPDATES FROM SUPERINTENDENT GURK

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Carleigh Thompson/*Fargo* and Fiona Sizemore/*Lizzie* perfected their baton handoff, earning 1st place in the two-person relay at all three District meets – for the second consecutive year – as well as at Regionals. Fiona also claimed 1st place in the “Hunter Over Fences” (jumping) event at all three District meets and Regionals, repeating her impressive streak from last year. Cora achieved multiple top-five finishes across the western, saddle seat, and gymkhana (speed) events. Addyson, Teddy, and Audrey also earned valuable points in showmanship, hunt seat English, western, and gymkhana events. To learn more about the Equestrian Team, please contact Coach Martin at bmartin@ioniaschools.org.



Superintendent Gurk

As you may know, our November 2025 no-mill-increase bond passed. Thank you, IPS community, for your support and trust. We will utilize these resources effectively to provide our students and staff with updated spaces for teaching and learning. Stay tuned as we bring these projects to life!

To serve our community and local veterans, IPS elementary students partnered with the Ionia VFW this fall to prepare the graves of local veterans for the winter season. IPS also hosted its 9th annual Veterans Ceremony and a Veterans Breakfast to recognize and commend our veterans. Thank you to our community donors who made these events possible: Cathy Hoppough Real Estate, El Mariachi, Mercantile Bank, Dan’s Bike Shop, Dood’s Jewelry, and Wilson Heating, Cooling, & Plumbing.

You and your families are invited to our 39th Annual Community Awards/Ice Cream Social in our IHS gym at 7 pm on April 15th. We hope you join us as we celebrate our students, staff, and volunteers of the year.

Have a great 2026!

Ben Gurk
Benjamin Gurk



IHS students Carleigh Thompson, Addyson Lepien, Fiona Sizemore, Audrey Sprank, & Cora Nummer

IONIA ATHLETICS

We are proud of our gritty Ionia Bulldog student-athletes who earned much success this fall season!



Our beloved and legendary Ionia educator and coach, Mr. James VanSyckle, passed away in December. Our teams honored him and his family by wearing Coach V shirts. We are committed to honoring his legacy by serving our community and giving our all in every practice and game.



Amelia McGee earned Swim All-State Honors!



Ava Benedict Qualified for Cross Cross State Finals!



Lila Redder earned Golf All-State Honors!



Thank you to our athletes, coaches, and parents who came together to support Ionia Community Awareness during Purple Week! Your passion, teamwork, and dedication were inspiring. We're proud to announce that the total raised this year was \$39,804.55!



We're proud of our IHS Volleyball Team, who had one of our best seasons in school history! We won our Conference Championship as well as our District Championship! Our Volleyball Team also broke the IHS record for most wins in a season! Grace Droste, Logan Thomas, and Tessa Lemke broke a combined ten individual school records as well!

PURPLE WEEK

- 1/27 Swim Purple Meet
- 1/28 Wrestling Purple Match
- 1/29 Bowling Purple Match
- 1/30 Basketball Purple Game

IONIA HIGH SCHOOL

We had an excellent first semester! Our Ionia High School (IHS) students and staff participated in a wide variety of activities ranging from strengthening community relations to building a positive school culture.



Shop with a Hero!

We are proud of our Interact Club, led by adviser Mrs. Pfaller, who continually serve our community!



National Honor Society (NHS) Blood Drive!

Thanks to our NHS students and NHS Adviser, Mrs. Maguire, whose blood drive saved many lives!



Student Council Operation Christmas!

Our Student Council students and adviser, Ms. Kay, continue to serve our community!



We are proud of our performing arts and extra curriculars at IHS!

IHS FAMILY SCHOOL GUILD VIRTUAL MEETINGS AT 6 PM

January 8

February 12

March 12

April 16

May 14

Check us out on Facebook to see how you can get involved!

IONIA HIGH SCHOOL

Congratulations to our gritty 63rd induction class of our IHS National Honor Society Chapter!



Community Service Blanket Project!

Many IHS students and teachers served our community by partnering with MDOC to create and donate blankets to community members!



Junior Achievement Community Partnerships!

This past fall, IHS hosted the Junior Achievement day wherein guest speakers visited to discuss professions such as finance, construction, physical therapy, real estate, health care, and more!

IONIA MIDDLE SCHOOL

Ionia Middle School had an incredible first semester! Our students' meaningful involvement in school life and community outreach has showcased the incredible spirit of our Bulldog Family. We are proud of these accomplishments and look forward to continuing this momentum throughout the rest of the year!



Our dedicated students have achieved significant growth or proficiency on the assessments and we are proud of all students who have graduated or leveled up in their classes!

We celebrated our new Student Council President and Vice President. Along with our other student council members, they exemplify what it means to be a HERO!



Our *Top Dawg* students are well-rounded, compassionate student leaders who foster positivity and give back to our community through dedicated service.

Congratulations to all of our HEROes of the month: Fiona Peterson, Jolee Chambers, Ethan Thomas, Lyla Younkin, Zavier Preston, Ezekiel Ondersma, Remi Steffen, Royale Sherman, Cylis Piche, Peyton Batista, Roeman Russell, Kylie Town, Mario Becerril, Zachariah Richardson, Owen Nash, Izayah Witzel, Jace Perry, Janessa Williams, Ace Stoakes, Carrie Lunsford, Carmen Hoppough, Peyton Cunningham, Seth Sedore, and Teric Hogan, Jovannie Walle Jr., Graceyn Renucci, Colton Gorby, Mackenzie Williford, Naythan Palmer, Aldrik Bennett, Lyrik Washington, Bailey Stencel, Mason Paulson, Hiromy Flores-Santana, Jacqualyynn Bailey, Dominic Stevenson, and Selene Davila.

IONIA MIDDLE SCHOOL

This fall, we hosted our inaugural *Breakfast with the Principals* event, offering our community a fun event and a complimentary breakfast!



IMS is grateful for our partnerships with the *Soaring Above Ionia Teen Center*, *Ionia County Sheriff's Department*, and local businesses that volunteer to teach real-world employment skills to our students.



Thank you to IHS alum Nadine Rewa, who has volunteered to lead an effort to update our Watt Auditorium display!



Current



Future Vision

IMS Parent-Teacher Group Meetings, Held at 6 PM

January 13

February 10

March 17

April 14

May 12

Please visit the IMS PTG Facebook page for more information and how you can get involved!

BOYCE WILDCATS

Learning is in full bloom! We've spent the first half of the year cultivating a growth mindset, where curiosity is celebrated and every mistake is a stepping stone to success. From mastering new concepts to developing critical social skills, our students are proving that with dedication and a supportive community, there are no limits to what they can achieve.



AR Family Reading Night was a great success, bringing families together to celebrate reading.



Bobby the Boot visited and led a fun student safety assembly that focused on emergency preparedness and the importance of awareness.

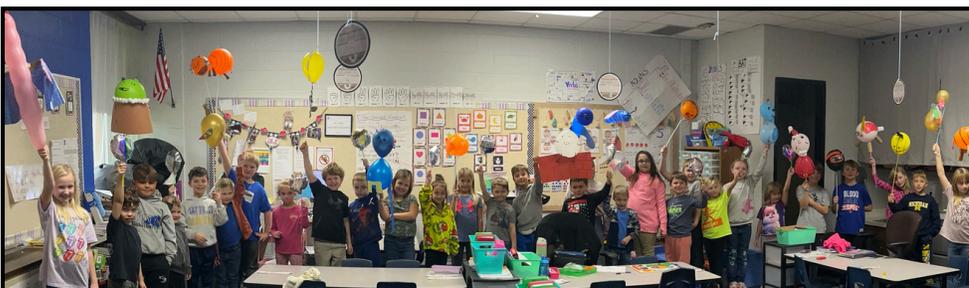


Our NED Show assembly featured impressive yo-yo tricks and a positive message about character:

- Never give up,**
- Encourage others, and**
- Do your best!**



Boyce wears ICA Purple to support our survivors, fighters, and taken.



Creativity took center stage at our *Balloons on Broadway* student showcase.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION!

1

Barn,
Pavilion
Hoop House,
Chicken Coop,
Goat Barn,
Green House &
Nature Trail

2

Pygmy Goats:
Rocky & Raya

3

Ecosystems studied on campus:
Forest, Field, and Wetlands

5

Integration Areas:
Butterflies, Birds, Herbs, Flower
Garden, Chickens & Goats

10

Chickens

30

Varieties of herbs, vegetables
and plants are grown

64

Acres of outdoor space & trails

EMERSON EAGLES

At Emerson, we don't just learn - **together, we S.O.A.R.!** We are proud of the milestones our students have achieved this year. From mastering new academic concepts to demonstrating growth in character and leadership, their progress reflects the power of their hard work and the support of our community!



Thanks to the support of our community, we now get to enjoy new playground equipment at Emerson.



Officer Skorka and Captain Heinlein shared fire safety tips to keep ourselves and our homes safe.



Our students showcased their musical and creative talents at our winter program held at the Ionia Community Theatre.



Fifth-grade students collaborated with our Ionia VFW to remove flags from local veterans' graves for the winter season.



Our third-grade students participated in the fun Water Safety Program at our Bulldog Aquatic Center!

JEFFERSON JAGUARS

It has been an incredible first semester at Jefferson Elementary! Take a moment to explore some of the fantastic happenings at our school. We are thrilled to dive into the second half of the academic year!



Our Ionia VFW trained our student-flag etiquette team on flag care. Our student team maintains our flag daily, showcasing their leadership and patriotism!



Captain Heinlein's fun, engaging, and important fire safety lesson was well received by our enthusiastic students!



Ashlynn Miller, 4th-grade dynamo, rocked the IPS Board Meeting by snagging an award for her Veterans Day Ceremony program cover art masterpiece!



Thank you to everyone who attended breakfast with your student and our nutrition team!



The Santa Secret Shop 2025 was a tremendous success!



Ms. Purcell's winter concert was an incredible success! Our student performers truly excelled!

RATHER RAMS

It has been a wonderful first semester at Arthur A. Rather Elementary School! Our students and staff are working diligently to be the best they can be. We were so blessed to have many special activities and fun educational events at Rather during the first half of our school year! We greatly appreciate the continued support from our amazing families and our community. Go Rams!



Fifth-grade students volunteered with our VFW at Tuttle Cemetery to remove flags from local veterans' graves for the winter season.



Rather students enjoyed Fire Safety Assemblies with Ionia Public Safety!



Congratulations to Mia Alger, Marley Simons, and Audrey Stein whose artwork was displayed on our IPS Veterans Ceremony programs!

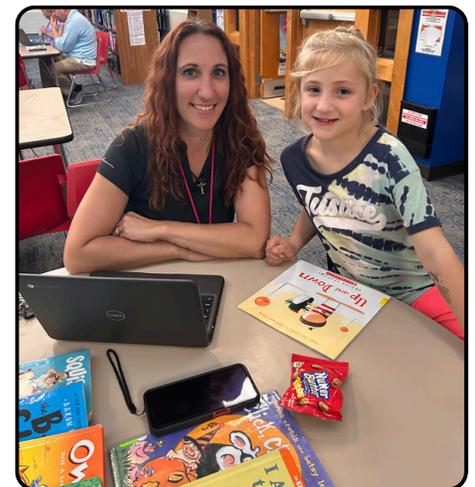


Thank you to our P.T.G. who funded our *Animals and the Environment* assemblies that helped make it a fun Fall Count Day!



Rather students enjoyed shopping at our Fall Scholastic Book Fair!

**Rather 2026
Parent Teacher Guild
Meetings**
January 12, 5:30 pm
February 9, 5:30 pm
March 9, 5:30 pm
April 13, 5:30 pm
May 11, 5:30 pm



Our Rather *Family Accelerated Reader Night* is the place to be!

TWIN RIVERS PANTHERS

Twin Rivers enjoyed a full and rewarding fall, filled with learning, teamwork, and new experiences. Our students and staff worked hard and supported one another, making this season a memorable one. We're excited to build on that success as we move forward. Have a great semester 2!



We are grateful to the multi-Grammy-winning Bluegrass artist and Twin Rivers alum, Billy Strings, who visited us and shared Thanksgiving meals with every TR family!



Twin Rivers students enjoyed returning to the Pollinator Garden they planted last spring. They also took a tour of the Muir Recycling Center.



Thank you to our Lyons Volunteer Fire Department who visited TR and taught our students about important fire safety!



WELCH WARRIORS

Douglas R. Welch High School is excited to welcome Mr. Chad Rhynard as our new Principal! Principal Rhynard is in his 11th year as an educator in Ionia Public Schools. He has served as an Ionia High School (IHS) teacher and football coach, and has taught a class at Welch High School during the past five years. Mr. Rhynard looks forward to this new opportunity to lead Welch High School.

We are excited to also welcome a new Welch High School teacher, Mr. Allen Wizorek! He is an IHS graduate and a U.S. Army Veteran. He began teaching as an IHS long-term guest teacher last year and also taught at Ionia Middle School this year. He's excited to now serve as a Welch High School teacher.



Principal Rhynard



Mr. Wizorek

Favorite Hobbies: Lifting Weights and Golfing

Favorite Book: *Above the Line*

Favorite Food: Steak & Fried Potatoes

Favorite Season: Fall

Dream Vacation: Alaskan Cruise

Watching Daughter's Softball Games

One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish

Chicken Cordon Bleu

Spring

Ireland



Follow us
on Facebook!

IMPORTANT DATES

Feb 13-16, 2026 Mid Winter Break

April 3-10 Spring Break-No School

May 15, 2026 D.R. Welch Graduation

June 2, 2026 Last Day of School



OUR MISSION

WHO WE ARE

A Community Dedicated to the Pursuit of Excellence

OUR PROMISE

WHAT WE COMMIT TO

Inspire, Persevere, Succeed



OUR SHARED VISION OF SUCCESS

- Increase Student Achievement**
 - Strengthen Social Emotional Resilience**
 - Recruit & Retain High Quality Staff**
 - Strengthen Community Relations**
 - Improve & Maximize Infrastructure**
-

OUR CORE VALUES

- Growth Mindset**
- Respect**
- Integrity**
- Teamwork**
- CommUNITY**
- Pride**



IPS CALENDAR

January 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

January 2026

- 1-2 Winter Break
- 5 First Day for Students 1/2 Day All
- 19 Staff PD All Day/No school students

February 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

February 2026

- 11 Student Count Day
- 13 Staff PD All Day/No school students
- 16 Mid-Winter Break - No School

March 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

March 2026

- 9 PTC K-5 5:00-7:30 PM
- 10 PTC 6-8 5:00-7:00 PM
- 11 PTC 9-12 5:00-7:00 PM
- 12 Students AM PTC K-8 1-4, 5-7PM
- 12 PTC 9-12 1:00-3:30, 5-7 PM
- 13 No School
- 27 1/2 Students/ PM PLC

April 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

April 2026

- 3 No School - Good Friday
- 6-10 Spring Break
- 22 Freshman Welcome 6:30-7:30 PM
- 22 Freshman Welcome Staff 6-7:30 PM

May 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

May 2026

- 22 Staff PD All Day/No school students
- 25 Memorial Day
- 29 Students AM Staff Full Day

June 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

June 2026

- 1 Students AM Staff Full Day
- 2 Last Day Students Half Day All

I IONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

250 E. Tuttle Rd
Ionia, MI 48846

24 Hour Attendance Lines

Boyce Elementary 616 - 527 - 8011

Emerson Elementary 616 - 527 - 8045

Jefferson Elementary 616 - 527 - 8048

Rather Elementary 616 - 527 - 8033

Twin Rivers Elementary 616 - 522 - 0007

Ionia Middle School 616 - 527 - 8044

Ionia High School 616 - 527 - 2780

D.R. Welch High School 616 - 527 - 3530

Board of Education

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Ken Baker, Vice President

Robin Marhofer, Secretary

Dayna Ellis, Treasurer

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