SPRING LAKE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NEWSLETTER
FALL 2026
QUICK UPDATES, DISTRICTWIDE
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MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dennis Furton

Dear Laker Parents and Community Members,

As Thanksgiving approaches, I find myself reflecting on how much we have to be grateful for in Spring Lake Public Schools. We are fortunate to have outstanding facilities, strong academic programs, and a community that deeply values education. But when I consider what truly makes our district special, my thoughts turn first to our people.

Every day, remarkable things happen in our schools, often without notice. A teacher takes a few extra minutes with a struggling student. A paraprofessional offers reassurance to a child who needs it. A bus driver's smile helps students start the day on a positive note. A coach teaches a lesson about perseverance that reaches far beyond the playing field.

These moments rarely make headlines or show up in test scores and rankings. Yet they shape both the experiences our students have and the people they become.

I'm equally grateful for the families and community members who support our schools. Whether volunteering, attending events, supporting our educators, or simply encouraging their children to do their best, they make a meaningful difference.

Our district's motto, "Big enough to challenge, small enough to care," is more than words. It comes to life through the relationships, kindness, and dedication of everyone in our school community.

This Thanksgiving, I encourage each of us to take a moment to recognize someone who has made a positive difference in our lives or our children's lives.

On behalf of Spring Lake Public Schools, thank you for all the ways you help make our district such a special place. I wish you and your families a wonderful Thanksgiving.



CURRICULUM UPDATE

KATE DRAKE

In an ongoing commitment to our community via the SLPS strategic plan, staff recently learned about Restorative Practices (RP) during the October 19th district-wide professional learning day. Teacher leaders from within sought expertise to become trainers of these practices - and have added benefit to all.

A community-first approach to school culture, RP helps ensure student feelings of safety, value and support for their learning. Grounded in relationship building, this approach moves beyond traditional “discipline” by teaching students empathy, accountability and constructive communication skills. Proactively, these practices rely on daily connections like morning check-in circles, community-building dialogues and even academic-focused discussion. Routines build a warm, inclusive environment where all practice emotional literacy and respect before challenges arise. When conflict occurs, RP guides students to understand the impact of their actions and collaboratively make things right.

Key benefits include:

- **Stronger Belonging:** Greater emotional safety and classroom engagement.
- **Fewer Disruptions:** Proactive circles reduce behavioral referrals.
- **Lifelong Skills:** Early practice in empathy and self-awareness.

By implementing Restorative Practices in our strategic plan and using student survey metrics for K-12 behavior goals, SLPS continues to actively construct a compassionate community where all students thrive. We’ll continue to explore and practice these approaches, with more growth time taking place during professional learning in February.







OPERATIONS UPDATE

LIZ BOEVE

We are feeling great about our continued progress following through on our 2023 bond commitments!

Our athletic updates are moving right on schedule. In the last two months, we opened our 12-court tennis facility and expanded south parking. Next spring, Laker teams will take the field at the brand-new Hickman baseball field and the revamped Wanrooy softball field, featuring upgraded synthetic turf.

Inside the high school, Phase 3 construction is underway—adding two new classrooms on the south end and renovating four instructional spaces. While this work has temporarily displaced several educators, we are deeply grateful for their flexibility and patience throughout the transition. Thank you for your continued support as we build for the future!

Kids v. Cops Kickball: Community Building at Its Best

There is no better sign of autumn at Spring Lake Intermediate School than an afternoon filled with cheering students and friendly competition. The Kids v. Cops Kickball Game captured the absolute definition of what makes our district so special as our 5th and 6th graders took to the field for a high-energy matchup against a fantastic crew from the Ottawa County Sheriff's Office.

A huge thank you goes to our dedicated School Resource Officer, Deputy Johnson, for rallying his fellow deputies to step onto the field. Events like these do far more than provide a break from class—they offer a meaningful way for students to build genuine trust, positive relationships, and mutual respect with local law enforcement in a fun, approachable setting.

From the very first pitch, the energy on the sidelines was electric. The afternoon was packed with impressive outfield catches, powerhouse kicks, non-stop high-fives, and plenty of shared laughter. While both teams brought their best effort and displayed great sportsmanship, word on the playground confirmed that our Intermediate School students officially clinched the victory and earned bragging rights for the year!

We extend our deepest gratitude to Deputy Johnson, the Ottawa County Sheriff's Office, and our Intermediate staff for organizing such a memorable game. Moments like this remind us how special our Laker community truly is.



Elite Excellence: All SLPS Schools in Michigan's Top 40

Spring Lake Public Schools is breathing rare air! In the latest rankings released by *U.S. News & World Report*, every single school building across our district—Jeffers Elementary, Holmes Elementary, Spring Lake Intermediate, Spring Lake Middle, and Spring Lake High School—placed in the Top 40 of its category in Michigan.

While this recognition makes us deeply proud, we hold it in perspective: rankings don't define our culture—our daily work does. True excellence is measured in everyday moments: a breakthrough in a reading group, a mentor staying late, or families volunteering to support our classrooms.

This achievement isn't the result of a single test score; it is the natural outcome of an incredible partnership between students, staff, families, and community members working together. Thank you to everyone who contributes to our culture of excellence across Spring Lake Public Schools. This honor belongs to all of us!

Culture of Kindness on Our Bike Paths

We are proud to partner with Spring Lake Village and Township to build a Culture of Kindness on our local bike paths! With dozens of Lakers biking to school when the weather allows, practicing trail safety keeps our whole community safe, welcoming, and connected. Remember the Three C's: practice **Courtesy** by sharing the path, exercise **Caution** by watching for traffic and slowing at intersections, and maintain **Control** by riding at a safe, predictable speed. Let's lead the way, Lakers!





School Building Highlights Fall 2026

High School

- Our new H.E.R.E. framework is thriving! Teachers have already sent over 500 positive messages home recognizing students who embody Laker values. Every recognized student is also entered into our weekly Friday drawings to win official Spring Lake gear.

Middle & Intermediate Schools

- Our students brought incredible energy to this year's Walk-a-thons—including a first-ever event at the Middle School! Thanks to our generous community, the funds raised help offset camp expenses and support memorable year-end celebrations for our Lakers.

Holmes Elementary

- Holmes students showed outstanding teamwork and character by completely filling their school-wide H.E.A.R.T. Smart container! To celebrate reaching this milestone, our Lakers earned a high-energy "Brain Break Academy" assembly, generously sponsored by the Holmes Parent Club.

Jeffers Elementary

- Jeffers kicked off the year centered on belonging, prioritizing inclusion, positive interactions, and clear communication. Guided by student interviews and climate surveys, we know that when students, staff, and families feel safe and respected, classroom success naturally follows.







From the Voice of a Teacher

Mr. Aaron Zuelke

I just had a conversation with a student about not being able to relate to something only a teenager could understand. I pondered this for a moment and then reminded her that I was, in fact, a teenager once; it's kind of a prerequisite for adulthood. She, of course, rolled her eyes and tried to impress upon me that I didn't understand.

This made me think back about the world of a teenager, the awkward need to be liked alongside the insatiable desire to be different or to make one's mark in the world. Balancing the expectations of parents with the lure of independence. Every day is like some strange performance that's a mix between a cocktail party and an intense game of dodgeball.

What I realized after my foray into the chaos of a teenage mind is that I do often forget, and while that may be a sort of survival mechanism, it's an important reminder to remember. Remember what it's like to be so confident and so insecure all at the same time. Remember the importance of feeling like you belong and the incredible assurance a kind word from a teacher can have on you. I can still remember the things that teachers told me in high school, both sweet and bitter. A compliment on my art or a poem I wrote was partly the catalyst I needed to pursue this career. One thing I think I've gained from almost 30 years in education is that profound wisdom and insight can come from your students. Students may not know it while they say it, but they are capable of seeing through the fog of life and getting right to the heart of something. That's what I gained from this brief reflection on a student's eye roll: look for the gems in that exasperated gaze!



SPORTS HIGHLIGHT

From Comeback to Champion: Sophomore Tristan Hubbard Claims State Cycling Title

Spring Lake High School sophomore Tristan Hubbard has officially pedaled his way to the top, claiming the Varsity Division 1 State Championship in the Michigan Scholastic Cycling Association (MiSCA) series! Decided over a grueling six-race series spanning trail courses across Michigan and Northern Indiana, Hubbard's road to the podium was defined by pure grit. After a "Did Not Finish" (DNF) in the season opener left him deep in the overall points standings, he mounted an extraordinary comeback over the final five races, consistently outpacing the field to capture the state crown.

"I was in shock when I crossed the finish line," Hubbard shared. "I was pretty far behind in the points standings for the series in the first half due to a DNF in the first race, but I had a great comeback at the end." Racing locally with the West Michigan Coyotes junior mountain bike team, Hubbard has been cycling for seven years—turning a pandemic-era outdoor hobby into elite-level competition.

Competing at the Division 1 level takes serious discipline both on and off the trail. Aboard his Specialized Epic World Cup race bike, Hubbard logs roughly seven hours of training each week, balancing high-intensity intervals, long endurance rides, and recovery sessions. To stay on top of his high school coursework while meeting these demanding physical goals, he maximizes study time during the school day and schedules rides early in the evening to maintain a consistent sleep routine.

With a state title now secured, Hubbard is setting his sights even higher. He just finished the legendary Iceman Cometh Challenge in Traverse City—the largest point-to-point mountain bike race in the United States—as he builds toward competing nationally and racing in college.

Top 5 Spring Athletic Highlights

1. Girls Cross Country Claims Regional Crown: Dominating the course when it mattered most, our varsity runners outpaced the competition to bring home a Regional Championship title.
2. Girls Golf Completes the Three-Peat: Consistency and composure ruled the links as Girls Golf captured an incredible back-to-back-to-back OK Black Conference Championship.
3. Girls Field Hockey Makes History: Breaking new ground for the program, our field hockey squad secured the first playoff victory in school history with a thrilling postseason performance.
4. Boys Cross Country Punches State Ticket: Battling through a competitive field, the boys team locked in a strong third-place regional finish to earn their spot at the State Finals.
5. Football Delivers in the Clutch: Facing a must-win scenario in the final week of the regular season, Laker Football rose to the occasion to secure a playoff berth.

Honorable Mention: Competing in a co-op partnership with Grand Haven, our Boys Water Polo athletes made a splash in the postseason—finishing third in districts to advance to the regional tournament.













FIRE, SMOKE, AND ART: RAKU POTTERY AT SLMS

Ms. O'Brien recently brought an unforgettable 16th-century Japanese ceramic tradition to life at Spring Lake Middle School with a fast-paced, hands-on Raku pottery firing! Unlike traditional electric kilns that bake slowly for 24 hours behind closed doors, Raku delivers immediate, high-energy action filled with "wow" moments.

Students watched in amazement as glowing, red-hot pottery was pulled straight from an 1,850-degree kiln, placed into combustible materials, and rapidly quenched in cold water. This extreme thermal shock causes the glaze to crack as it cools, allowing smoke to seep into the micro-cracks and leave behind intricate, dark web-like patterns.

Because the dramatic firing process is completely unpredictable, no two pieces ever turn out the same—offering students an inspiring, real-world lesson in embracing imperfection. It was a remarkable blend of history, science, and creativity right outside our classrooms. Incredible work, SLMS!



FROM THE ARTS DEPARTMENT

High School

- AP Art students are exploring big questions—like childhood nostalgia and growing up—through sustained investigations.
- Visual arts students spent weeks mastering hyper-realism, building photo-accurate drawings millimeters at a time.
- Our performing arts ensembles had a blast coming together for this year's lively Fall Spooktacular event.
- Spring Lake Singers represented our district proudly, rocking the stage with a great performance at Oktoberfest.
- Bella Voce vocalists traveled to Central Michigan University to workshop alongside a professional vocal ensemble.
- Students build confidence and quick-thinking skills during free High School Improv sessions every Monday evening.

Middle & Intermediate Schools

- Taking advantage of crisp fall weather, photography students headed to the playground to explore forced perspective.
- Middle school choir students had a fantastic time performing and collaborating at the recent Sing event.
- Rehearsals are officially underway as our middle school cast and crew bring *The Lion King Jr.* to life.

Jeffers Elementary

- Jeffers is thrilled to share the newly completed Music Showcase recording celebrating our students' hard work.
- First graders blended Art and STEM, designing birds with specialized beaks and wings for habitat survival.

Holmes Elementary

- Holmes students made Halloween slime in an art collaboration pairing spooky storytelling with hands-on crafting.

CLASS NOTES

1970s

- **MICHAEL ROACH ‘73** enlisted in the Air Force in 1975 and retired in 1998; served 18 years as varsity head bowling coach at Pennfield High School, earning seven state championships and three runner-up finishes; inducted into the Michigan High School Coaches Association Hall of Fame; celebrated 41 years of marriage to Janit Anderson on November 15.

2000s

- **SHANE RYKE ‘06** is now a road patrol supervisor at the Ottawa County Sheriff’s Office.
- **KATY KRIEGER (GRZYB) ‘07** welcomed baby boy Maddox Krieger on July 31, 2026.
- **BRITTANY ZOK (WEAVERS) ‘08** is a Lead Preschool Teacher at Little Lakers Learning Center; lives in Norton Shores; married to Joe Zok since 2018; has three children, Zephyr (13), Athena (9), and a bonus son Jackson (18); volunteers with Boy Scout Troop 37 of Spring Lake.

2010s & 2020s

- **RYAN NAVARRE ‘19** is a planetary scientist at NASA Johnson Space Center supporting the Artemis program.
- **ALYSSA PATULSKI ‘19** is a 2nd-grade teacher at Turie T. Small Elementary School; now lives in Daytona Beach, FL.
- **ANNA THEUNE ‘21** is a 6th-grade Social Studies teacher at Kenowa Hills.

Spring Lake Public Schools recently celebrated the midyear retirements of two beloved district icons: Jerry Rabideau and Laurie Rycenga Draeger. Across more than 67 combined years at SLPS, their influence spanned literacy, physical education, athletics, community education, and graduation traditions.

Laurie Rycenga Draeger concludes a 42-year career in education, including 32 years at SLPS. Most proud of witnessing a caring teacher's impact on students, she looks forward to family time, gardening, and reading. Her parting wisdom: "Smile at each other, be tolerant, and celebrate our differences."

Jerry Rabideau retires after 36 years in education—35 1/3 of them right here at SLPS. Grateful for decades of relationships with staff and students, he plans to travel, fish, golf, and continue his role with Spring Lake Township.



Jerry Rabideau and Laurie Rycenga Draeger lead the way as Grand Marshals of this year’s Homecoming parade–a fitting celebration of their more than 67 combined years of heart and dedication to Spring Lake Public Schools.

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