Your Bond Dollars at Work for Our Children

The Transformation Plan, originally approved in the 2012-13 school year, is about developing, reinvesting, and expanding school choices. As another school year comes to a close, we want to provide another update to our community regarding the progress of our bond projects. The bond pledged to secure, connect, and transform our district. Three years in, and that is exactly what it is doing.

TRANSFORM

Southwest Community Campus and Plaza Roosevelt
Status: In progress

If you drive by the Clinica Santa Maria located on the corner of Grandville and Franklin, you will see that work has already begun. New affordable housing is under construction, built by Habitat for Humanity. Plaza Roosevelt—a partnership between Dwelling Place, Ferris State University, Grandville Avenue Arts & Humanities, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Habitat of Humanity of Kent County, Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, Mercy Health Saint Mary’s, Roosevelt Park Neighborhood Association, and the Resident Partner Committee—will

Ribbon cutting at Ridgemoor Park Montessori, August 2017.

How Are You Enjoying We Are GR?

The We Are GR Newspaper is a joint publication of Grand Rapids Public Schools and the City of Grand Rapids.

We want to make sure that it is meeting the needs and wants of our community.

Take a brief survey and you will be entered into a raffle for a chance to win a $50 gift card!

Please visit surveymonkey.com/r/WeAreGR2019

Thank you!
Asbestos Notice

Asbestos is a general name for a group of naturally occurring minerals composed of small fibers. These fibers are very strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. The mere presence of asbestos in a building does not mean that the health of the building occupants is endangered. When left intact and undisturbed, asbestos-containing materials do not pose a health risk to building occupants. There is, however, potential for exposure when the material becomes damaged or disturbed. Because of these problems associated with asbestos exposure, the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act, or AHERA emphasizes that asbestos in school buildings must be appropriately managed.

Grand Rapids Public Schools has an asbestos management plan that addresses contact persons, training, inspections, response actions, operation and maintenance activities, periodic surveillance, cleaning, disclosure efforts and school building areas containing asbestos. Any person may review the management plan at the Grand Rapids Public School’s Facilities Management Department, 900 Union, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503, during regular business hours (8:00 am to 4:00 pm). Plans may also be found on the district’s website at grps.org/facilities-asbestos-info.

Alternatively, any person may request a copy of the plan by writing the Grand Rapids Public Schools Facilities Management Department, 900 Union, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503. There is a cost involved in reproducing the document of approximately 10 cents per page. Grand Rapids Public Schools will send a copy out of the management plan within 5 business days of receiving the request.

New playground at Buchanan Elementary.
GRPS Grad Rates Increase for 7th Consecutive Year
Grad Rates Up Nearly 60% Since 2012

The Michigan Department of Education recently released the graduation rates for the 2017-2018 school year. For the seventh consecutive year, Grand Rapids Public Schools saw an increase in districtwide graduation rates. Since Superintendent Weatherall Neal took the helm at GRPS and launched the GRPS Transformation Plan, the district’s graduation rates have increased by nearly 60%. The numbers are equally impressive when broken down further.

All Schools – All Students: +59.9% (26.69 percentage points) increase since 2011-2012
African-American Students: +75% (30.45 percentage points) increase since 2011-2012
Hispanic/Latino Students: +76.4% (32.57 percentage points) increase since 2011-2012
Economically Disadvantaged Students: +78.8% (31.57 percentage points) increase since 2011-2012
English Language Learners: +95.6% (31.19 percentage points) increase since 2011-2012

“Over the past 7 years, our students and staff have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to improving outcomes, especially around graduation rates. Our standards have remained high, and I’m pleased to see more students each year rising to them,” said Superintendent Teresa Weatherall Neal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Group</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
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<td>67.58%</td>
<td>78.33%</td>
<td>81.87%</td>
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*Denotes small class size (30 or fewer students)
Painting, Podcasting or Rocking Out, Students Find Joy in Self-Expression

By Charles Honey, photos by Dianne Carroll Burdick, Courtesy of School News Network

An enticing aroma filled the hallways of North Park Montessori School as students cooked up Vietnamese chicken pho in the kitchen. In a nearby classroom, parent Sarah Jacques taught Anja Kholsinger-Robinson how to cross-stitch, and grandmother Rebecca Leacock helped Harrison Stidolph cut out sewing fabric. In another room, North Park teacher Nijagara Davidson taught the Bosnian language to a table of students with a song, “Eci Peci Pec.” Meanwhile, down in the gym, former NFL player Dave Brandt had boys running pass patterns, while in the basement lunch room a student rock band called OLIVEPIT happily blasted original tunes.

This is self-expressions, a weekly session where North Park’s 60 seventh- and eighth-graders can try their hand at a smorgasbord of creative activities, all taught by volunteer “advisers.” It’s a key component of the Montessori way, designed to help students discover new interests and gain confidence.

“I like it because it gets on my creative side,” said seventh-grader Kasiel Robinson, as she spelled out “living lovely” with plastic beads in a perler-beading class.

Many classes are conceived and designed by students themselves, another way the program aims to empower them while stretching their young minds.

“It’s really fun,” said eighth-grader Anna Kalumbula, who sang in the rock band. “You think, ‘I don’t want to do this.’ Once you’re doing it, you’re like, ‘Whoa, this is awesome!’

The Virtues of Valorization

The self-expressions program is an important part of what Montessori philosophy calls “valorization.” That is, students experiencing success through their own efforts, said teacher Jennifer Hall, who has helped oversee the program since the North Park middle school opened five years ago.

“It’s not an adult telling them they’ve done a good job,” said Hall, who is trained in the Montessori Method. “It’s their peers. They gain standing in the community for who they are.”

Whether painting a picture, building a robot or recording a podcast, students are “building pride in what they do,” she added. That includes students who may struggle academically but shine in a special skill: “They have value, and they are seen for their value in that way.”

The program goes hand-in-hand with other activities designed to connect students to one another, their school and their community, said Principal Maureen Capillo. These “stewardship and engagement” activities include twice-weekly service projects, such as visits to Clark Retirement Community, and in-school efforts, like better organizing the lost and found.

“This work is extremely important for our adolescents, their brain development and their sense of social service and community involvement,” Capillo said.

Students Help Create Courses

At North Park, that involvement extends to student government, whose leaders were elected first semester. Student-planned and organized, the group meets weekly to address school issues. A big one for this spring is electing a new school mascot to replace its current one, a peace tree.
(Animals are being considered.) Students also elected a supreme court, which they hope can resolve minor student conflicts in a quasi-judicial process.

Eighth-grader Walker Idziak, a senator and secretary of state, was a driving force behind student government. He also took a self-expressions class in podcasting, where students were producing a piece about pawn shops. They hoped to submit it to an NPR student podcast challenge.

Eighth-grader Lena Chase initiated a French class. Students Noah Krull and Marek Remtema helped form the self-expressions rock band, after previously creating a BMX class complete with obstacle course. “It’s really nice,” Noah said of the classes. “We get a solid uninterrupted hour of doing what we want.”

That’s the great thing about self-expressions, said Sarah Jacques, who taught the cross-stitching class and is mother to seventh-grader Lucia.

“Whatever motivates them, what they want to learn about, what inspires them, I want them to be able to do,” she said. “Sometimes students do something they’ve never done before.”

For Anna Kalumbula, who sang with the basement band and is vice president of student government, the chance to express herself and be involved is a welcome part of her Montessori schooling.

“It’s a nice way for us to have something educational,” she said, “yet you’re still having a lot of fun doing things with friends.”

Patricia Wunder, orchestra director and string instructor at Gerald R. Ford Academic Center, was recently awarded $1,091 by the Michigan Youth Arts on behalf of the Michigan Council of Arts and Cultural Affairs.

Music is instrumental at Ford. Wunder teaches all K-4th grade students to play violin as part of their curriculum for music classes. 5th grade students have the opportunity to learn how to play instruments in a string orchestra, and 6th-8th grade students have the chance to select band or orchestra. Kindergarten and 1st grade students share a classroom set of violins. Once they reach 2nd grade, students are assigned an instrument that they are then able to take home to practice with the exception of cello and bass players, who do not have enough instruments to accommodate each student.

With the grant, Wunder was able to purchase two different sized violin cases, two bass bows, and a full-sized cello for her students.

“They are excited about these materials,” says Wunder. “I have a middle school cellist who is excited to have a cello that is the right size for him, my middle school bass players are excited about having two new bows, and many students are excited about getting a new case to replace the broken cases that they have been using.”

In March, 7th and 8th grade band and orchestra students participated in the GRPS Fine Arts Band and Orchestra Festival, where they performed for adjudicators.
Preschool: Starting Off Right!

Did You Know...

- A high quality preschool education will give your child the needed skills to be successful in Kindergarten and beyond.
- Research has shown that those who have attended preschool programs are more likely to graduate from high school, get better jobs, and earn higher wages than those who did not attend a preschool program.
- Grand Rapids Public Schools provides world-class preschool learning opportunities to qualifying preschoolers in ALL of our district’s elementary schools throughout the city.

Grand Rapids Public Schools’ World-Class preschool programs provide young children with the foundation for both academic and social-emotional success. Within our World-Class PreK classrooms, children will have the opportunity to learn social-emotional, motor, cognitive, and academic skills in a developmentally appropriate play-based environment through engaging, fun, hands on activities.

Whether children are busy exploring with magnifying glasses in the classroom’s discovery area, building intricate creations in the block area, letting their imaginations run wild in dramatic play environments, or making masterpieces in the art area, children in GRPS preschools are building skills and developing the attitudes of life-long learners!

Mark your calendar now for Friday, May 3rd to attend Preschool Here I Come. From 9 am - 3 pm on this day, all of our GRPS elementary schools will be welcoming families into our PreK classrooms to meet the teachers, check out our awesome environments, ask questions, and fill out enrollment paperwork. If you have a future preschooler who will be 4 by December 1, 2019 we encourage you to attend this great event on Friday May 3rd.

Contact the Early Childhood office of Grand Rapids Public Schools today at (616) 819-2111 to learn more about preschool options for your child!

Making a Mighty Impact on GRPS Students

By Salina Bishop

Education is a great equalizer. So what happens when the very foundation of education shifts? When funds are cut, and teachers are expected to do far more with very little? When teachers are leaving at a record pace, yet students are required to learn just as quickly regardless of those transitions? When student struggles mount and barriers continue to surface? As each dollar becomes scarcer and educators are forced to become more creative in making the almighty dollar go farther, how can we make an impact?

The Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation exists to make that mighty impact! With the help of our generous donors, we make sure Grand Rapids Public Schools’ teachers can focus on teaching and students can focus on learning.

It’s no secret education is constantly evolving. Districts are required to meet new benchmarks, yet government funding is pared down at an enormous rate. This creates inequity, and inequity in educational experiences has significant and lasting consequences. Inequity, simply put, hinders opportunities for our most important treasure – our students.

As the Foundation for Grand Rapids Public Schools, we focus on five critical impact areas we believe are vital to not only ensuring all students succeed in school but also in life. These educational impact areas are Arts, Environment, Literacy, Math, Science & Technology, and Physical Wellness.

Our vision as a Foundation is to put more books in front of our students, place more instruments at their fingertips, encourage arts exploration, afford more access to free sports, provide more journeys to culturally significant destinations, but most of all our goal is to reinforce equity in their education. We know it takes a village, and this community is the village which will ensure ALL GRPS students experience vital educational opportunities!

When a community rallies together, we can enhance students’ learning, education can be brought to life and made more tangible for students - broadening their experiences with each opportunity explored. When the community supports the Foundation, they are supporting an equitable approach to education where student success will no longer be dictated by access to resources, but instead only by their own unlimited potential and interests. Together, we can level the playing field, we can remove barriers, and we can come together behind every GRPS school, behind every student and say we are with you!

Want to make a mighty impact on the educational journeys of Grand Rapids Public School students?

Visit gRsAf.org.

GRASP is a summer Math and Reading correspondence program parents can purchase for their children completing grades K-8. There is also an online version for grades 4-8. GRASP seeks to help students retain skills learned during the past school year by providing review exercises created by curriculum professionals and teachers.

There are 9 units to be submitted during the summer—one per week or your child’s own to work around other activities, as long as everything is submitted by the deadline. Each lesson reinforces the basic skills typically taught at that grade level. GRASP staff score the lesson and return it to the student with comments. Online students get immediate results.

Students who successfully complete at least 7 of 9 lessons by the deadline are awarded a GRASP certificate. A medal is awarded for 9 successfully completed lessons.

GRPS students will receive enrollment forms from their schools soon. Students from other schools should first check with your child’s school to see if they participate as they may get a discounted rate.

Sign up for GRASP at grps.org/grasp or by calling (616) 819-2548
DID YOU KNOW?

All Grand Rapids Public Schools serve FREE breakfast for all students.
Contact your school for serving times.
We would love to have your children join us!

SUMMER MEALS

Grand Rapids Public Schools will again be sponsoring nutritious summer meals. We look forward to serving your children.

Nutritious summer meals for kids ages 18 and under. Everyone welcome!

WE’RE HIRING!

Grand Rapids Public Schools is seeking candidates for cook positions. This is a part time position that you will be trained for. If you are interested in part time employment during the school year, please apply online by visiting grps.org and clicking “careers”.

Remember: professional references cannot be family members or friends.
If you have questions, please contact Jennifer Laninga at (616) 819-1669 or Lisa Dilworth at (616)819-2135
Summer Camp Guide

Sherman Lake YMCA Camp
Augusta, MI
(269) 731-3000
www.shermanlakeymca.org/camp
Sherman Lake YMCA offers a summer of growth for your child and memories that will last a lifetime! Through discovery of the great outdoors, skill development, and the building of healthy relationships, campers leave with a renewed sense of belonging, confidence and courage to try new things. That’s what keeps campers coming back to Sherman Lake YMCA Summer Camp! Sherman Lake offers Day, Overnight and High School Leadership Camp opportunities for campers ages 4-18. Scholarships are available.

YMCA Camp Manitou-Lin
1095 N. Briggs Rd.
Middleville, MI 49333
(888) 909-2267
www.grymcaclml.org
SUMMER STARTS HERE! Make this summer one to remember at YMCA Camp Manitou-Lin and choose from 9 weeks of overnight or day camp fun, adventure, and friendships! Horseback riding, zip-lining, swimming, rock climbing, kayaking and so much more make for good times and great memories, visit grymcaclml.org to register today! Prices start at $225 – financial scholarships available, call to inquire.

Ferris State University
1201 S. State Street
Big Rapids, MI 49307
151 Fountain Street, NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
Kendall College of Art & Design
17 Pearl St. NW
ferris.edu/summercamps
Ferris State University offers various sports and academic summer camps for kids. Whether you’re looking for a day camp or a sleep-away camp, Ferris offers a variety for many different interests. Campers gain a university experience while participating in faculty led academic camps and varsity team led sports camps. Costs and discounting vary by camp selected. See website for more information.

Cran-Hill Ranch
(231) 796-7669
www.cranhillranch.com
Cran-Hill Ranch has summer youth camps, horse & specialty camps, a full service 120 site family campground resort, cottages and a retreat facility for any size group. Located near Big Rapids, MI on 380 beautiful acres with 2 all-sports lakes offering incredible programs, activities and services. Faith-building, life-changing fun with a purpose. Something for everyone! Day camp starts at $99.

Tall Turf Ministries
2010 Kalamazoo Ave SE
(616) 452-7906
www.tallturf.org
Camp Tall Turf provides a culturally diverse and inclusive Christian camp experience for youth ages 8-17. We have unique sessions including Youth Adventure Camp, Olympics, and Young Leaders. Additionally, we offer weekend camp sessions for families. Affordable pricing is offered on a sliding fee scale based on family size and income.

Camp Henry
Newaygo, MI
(616) 459-CAMP
www.camphenry.org
Camp Henry sits on 200 beautiful acres in Newaygo, with over 1/4 mile of lake frontage on Kimball Lake and provides an ideal setting for summer campers, school groups, youth group retreats, sports teams, and family camps. We offer over 50 awesome programs, from high adventure courses and zip lines to canoeing and horseback riding. Summer camp prices start at $235. Scholarships available.

Humane Society of West Michigan
Grand Rapids, MI
(616) 453-8900
hswestmi.org/camps
A great place for your child to spend their summer learning, growing and having a fun filled experience that will leave a lasting impression! Prices start at $90. Ages 6 and up are welcome!

West Michigan Center for Arts + Technology (WMCAT)
Grand Rapids, MI
(616) 454-7004
www.wmcat.coursestorm.com
Join the West Michigan Center for Arts + Technology (WMCAT) for your most creative summer yet! We’ll be offering a variety of summer camps for current 6th-11th grade students in June and July. These 4-day camp sessions will be meet Monday-Thursday, with both morning and afternoon options available. Tuition ranges from $100-115, with need-based scholarships available. Register at the website above or contact us at teenprograms@wmcat.org or (616) 454-7004.

YMCA Summer Branch Day Camps & Clinics
Locations throughout West Michigan
(616) 855-9622
www.grymca.org/summer-day-camps
Summer is the time for discovery! From field trips to fostering creativity, we help kids flourish and explore new talents and interests while having fun all summer long. We offer convenient hours and affordable pricing for kids ages 5-12 at locations throughout Greater Grand Rapids. Visit grymca.org/summer-day-camps to register today!

Ferris State University offers various sports and academic summer camps for kids. Whether you’re looking for a day camp or a sleep-away camp, Ferris offers a variety for many different interests. Campers gain a university experience while participating in faculty led academic camps and varsity team led sports camps. Costs and discounting vary by camp selected. See website for more information.
Free admission for Kent County children!

School-Based Health Centers
Convenient care for students
Services Provided: Counseling, dental, vaccines, and medical including treatment for illness or injuries and much more
Cherry Health
cherryhealth.org

Citywide Art Show
APRIL 24–MAY 9

REAL PEOPLE
REAL MORTGAGES

MERCANTILE BANK MORTGAGE SERVICES
There are plenty of mortgage options out there, but chances are there is only one that is just right for you. Let a Mercantile Bank mortgage lender help you find the perfect mortgage for your life and your future. No gimmicks and no games, just solid mortgage options with competitive rates designed around your needs.
Visit MercBank.com/Mortgage to find a local Mercantile lender and to see our current loan specials.

PUBLIC RECEPTION S FOR GRPS FAMILIES AND FRIENDS
April 30  5:00—6:30 PM  |  GRPS Secondary Schools & all Non-Public Schools
May 2  5:00—6:30 PM  |  GRPS K-5, K-8, & Center Based Programs
Students See New Horizons, Thanks to Free Glasses

By Cris Greer, Courtesy of School News Network

Seventh-grader Frederick Charles said his new glasses opened up a whole new world for him, academic and otherwise.

After putting on the new glasses he received through Vision To Learn, Aberdeen School seventh-grader Frederick Charles had much to say about his new look.

“My grades will go way up,” he said. “I’ll get back to A’s. Everything will be easier to read in school.”

Just like 21 other students at Aberdeen, a PK-8 school, he recently got new glasses to fit an updated prescription, thanks to a new school district partnership aimed at improving vision for up to 3,000 students. The generosity was not lost on him.

“It’s amazing,” Frederick added. “It’s a real blessing. People are nice enough to give us glasses. We really need them.”

His mother, Vernee Pearson, would be thrilled, too, he predicted: “She’s going to be so excited when I get home. I can’t wait to see her reaction.”

He couldn’t have been more correct. His mom said she hasn’t seen that excitement in his eyes in a long time.

“I was excited to see that he was excited,” Pearson said, about three weeks after the glasses give-away. “He has been more delightful at home. I see a big difference and it’s been such a relief for him. He is able to study the way he needs to.”

Removing Barriers to Learning

In collaboration with Grand Rapids Public Schools and the Kent County Health Department, nonprofit organization Vision To Learn launched its program at Aberdeen and plans to roll it out to all 54 GRPS schools.

Aberdeen Principal Jamie Masco said her students were thrilled to get those glasses, and she’s thrilled by the initiative.

“They felt like real superstars when they were called up to the podium to receive their glasses,” Masco said. “They were grinning from ear to ear. I am grateful and honored that Vision To Learn chose to begin their journey at Aberdeen School and that other GRPS students will benefit from this amazing organization.

Besides being stars for the day, the students should see significant learning gains by getting vision screenings, eye exams and prescription eyeglasses, Masco added. “In today’s world, it is imperative that we remove as many barriers as possible in order to ensure academic and social-emotional success for our students.”

At Aberdeen, 174 students received vision screenings, 35 got eye exams, and 22 students were provided glasses. According to Joann Hoganson, community wellness director for the Kent County Health Department, a screening is a number of tests designed to determine whether a student should be referred for a professional examination.

An examination is when a series of tests are performed by an ophthalmologist or optometrist, assessing the vision and ability to focus on and discern objects, as well as other tests pertaining to the eyes.

Program has Local Roots

The charity’s founder, Austin Beutner, superintendent of Los Angeles Unified School District, grew up in Grand Rapids and pegged his hometown as a place to help.

Vision To Learn started with one van in Los Angeles in 2012 and now helps serve children in low-income communities in over 300 cities in 12 states. It serves the needs of the hardest-to-reach children; about 90 percent of kids served by Vision To Learn live in poverty and about 85 percent are children of color.

About one in five students will naturally need glasses to see the board, read a book or participate in class, according to the VTL website. Unfortunately, in low-income communities across the country, 95 percent of kids who need glasses (about 2 million) do not have them.

Since its inception, the program has helped provide vision screenings to over 800,000 kids, eye exams for over 170,000 and glasses for 135,000, all free of charge to students and their families.

Research by faculty from the Mattel Children’s Hospital at UCLA, about students who received glasses from Vision To Learn, showed the students’ grades improved and they were more engaged in the classroom. Students with untreated vision problems often struggle at school, and they are less likely to achieve reading proficiency by third grade, putting them at greater risk of dropping out.

Locally, Joann Hoganson, community wellness director for the Kent County Health Department, said the department’s nine full-time technicians screen children for vision deficits. But their rate of helping families afford the glasses for children who need them is “embarrassingly low,” a problem the partnership will greatly reduce, she said.

“The Health Department’s primary role is to identify children who potentially need further visual care and then to come alongside the parents in order to secure treatment,” Hoganson said. “While every effort is made to make sure the children get the follow-up they need, some children are not able to get the glasses they need, even when the parent knows the child has a vision deficit. New options such as VTL help us accomplish this important goal in a more efficient manner.”

The Health Department’s hearing and vision technicians screened a total of 93,000 children for potential hearing and visual deficits last year, according to Hoganson. Of that amount, 53,934 were screened for vision, 4,920 were identified as having potential visual problems and referred on for care, and 2,070 of those referred children received an eye examination.

Fifth-grader Jack Klein makes no secret of his new-glasses glee after getting a pair from Superintendent Teresa Weatherall Neal, thanks to the Vision To Learn initiative.
His mom was a teacher here, according to Vision To Learn President Ann Hollister, who said the 1978 East Grand Rapids High School graduate wanted to make sure Grand Rapids had this program.

An estimated 3,000 children in Grand Rapids go to school daily without the glasses they need to see the board, read a book or participate in class. Through this collaboration, every student in GRPS will be provided a vision screening, eye exam, and, if needed, a pair of glasses, free of charge.

“Children who have trouble seeing often struggle in class, yet many students lack access to basic vision care,” Hollister said. “By bringing free eye exams to kids at school, Vision To Learn helps them get the glasses they need to succeed.” GRPS Superintendent Teresa Weatherall Neal called the partnership “a game changer” for those children and families, adding that she expects the program to benefit students throughout the school system.

“I imagine being in school, not having glasses, not being able to see, not having the resources to get those glasses,” Neal said. “Now we will be able to have this barrier removed thanks to our partnership with Vision To Learn.

“It’s rare that a single intervention can make such an immediate and meaningful difference in a student’s education. Through this program, students who need glasses will get glasses, and as a result, they are more likely to do better at school.”

Frederick’s mom said she has seen evidence of that already. “He hasn’t been acting up in school like he has been in the past,” Pearson said. “I think the lack of him being able to see played a lot to his behavioral issues and I believe he got bored and started acting out. Since his glasses, I haven’t had any phone calls or anything of that nature. It’s pretty awesome.”

Pearson also said he has been very responsible with his glasses.

“He has been keeping up with them, cleaning them and keeping them in the case and keeping them away from his little brother.”

Second-grader Jekia Brooks gets a high-five from school board member Tony Baker, right, and Vision To Learn President Ann Hollister, center, and encouragement from Joann Hoganson, community wellness director for the Kent County Health Department.

Aberdeen School fourth-grader Ariana White is clearly pleased to receive a new pair of glasses from GRPS Superintendent Teresa Weatherall Neal.

WMCAT Idea Lab

Looking for a summer job that uses your creativity? The West Michigan Center for Arts + Technology (WMCAT) invites young creatives to join us for Idea Lab 2019, an eight-week summer employment experience through which you will learn about video production and develop content that will be featured across Grand Rapids during Project 1, ArtPrize’s new citywide public art event in fall 2019. WMCAT is a Summer Learning Academy site with Believe to Become, so you’ll not only collaborate in groups on a creative project, but you’ll also sharpen your math skills and explore college and career possibilities. Applications are being accepted now, with priority enrollment given to students who live within the Hope Zone neighborhoods.

Apply at believe2become.org/programs/summer-learning-academies/ Questions? Contact us at teenprograms@wmcat.org or 616-454-7004.

WMCAT Arts + Tech Camps

Join the West Michigan Center for Arts + Technology (WMCAT) for your most creative summer yet! We’ll be offering a variety of summer camps for current 6th-11th grade students in June and July. These 4-day camp sessions will be meet Monday-Thursday, with both morning and afternoon options available. Tuition ranges from $100-115, with need-based scholarships available. Visit www.wmcat.coursestorm.com to register or contact us at teenprograms@wmcat.org or 616-454-7004.
Teaching Healthy Eating and Job Skills

He also sees value in helping children overcome barriers at a young age. He is cofounder and co-director of Kitchen Sage, a workforce development program serving students ages 18 to 24.

It offers an eight-week course on food safety, first aid and marketable skills, and sets up 90-day paid internships with community partners to help get young adults jobs in the food and restaurant industry. Based on Grand Rapids’ West Side, it also prepares lunches for about 1,500 students at seven preschools of the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative.

Stermin is well-qualified for the role, having been a chef at several local restaurants, as a board member of the American Culinary Federation and advisory board member of the Culinary Institute of Michigan. He has taught classes for low-income parents through Steepletown Neighborhood Services, helping them prepare nutritious, economical meals with crockpots.

He sees firsthand what barriers many young people have had to overcome to be successful adults. He wants to help the children of Mulick Park — and GRPS more broadly — get on the right path, whether through donating a kindness program or teaching them good diet.

“Nutrition is so huge in not only a child’s development, but their attitude,” Stermin says. “I would love to be part of a team, getting them more education on healthy eating.”

For now, he and Heather are doing what they can to help Waverly and her classmates do well, and treat each other nicely.

Justin Stermin is co-director of Kitchen Sage, which teaches culinary skills to young adults and prepares meals for preschoolers.
Fuel Up with Breakfast

Eating breakfast has been linked to many benefits:

- **Increased test scores, math grades, memory, and learning.**
- **Increased attendance, behavior, and attention.**
- **Decreased childhood obesity.**

**17.5% HIGHER SCORES ON STANDARDIZED MATH TESTS**

**THOSE WHO EAT BREAKFAST ATTEND 1.5 MORE DAYS OF SCHOOL PER YEAR**

**CHILDREN WHO EAT BREAKFAST HAVE A LOWER BODY MASS INDEX THAN THOSE WHO SKIP BREAKFAST**

For more information visit MilkMeansMore.org.

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Ottawa Hills High School Boys Swim and Dive Team Enjoys Record-Breaking Season

Highest finish at Division 3 state finals in school history, plus broken school records and academic accomplishments round out stellar year

It was a year of broken records for the Ottawa Hills High School boys swimming and diving team.

The Bengals had their highest team finish of 16th place at the Division 3 state finals on March 8 and 9 at Oakland University.

Diver Caleb Hekman made All-State by placing fifth, tying a school record going back to 1990 when Robin Ward placed fifth at the state meet. The team achieved several academic honors and broke a few school records along the way this season as well.

Ottawa Hills tied Pinckney for 16th place with a total of 40 points, while Holland Christian won the D3 state title with 323.5 points. Area swimming giants East Grand Rapids placed second at 267.

“I knew that we were going to have a good season, we have a very talented senior class that had already placed at the state meet as juniors,” said coach Eve Julian, in her 14th season at Ottawa Hills. “We also added a very fast freshman backstroker (Jonathan Hoffman) this year. I had no idea that we would place as high as we did, though. Especially considering how much training we missed in January and February due to pool issues, the polar vortex and the ice storm.”

**Hekman (All-State, possibly All-American)**

Julian said Hekman, a City High/Middle School senior, is an all-around athlete.

“In middle school, he participated in four sports each year: soccer, basketball, bowling and baseball,” said Julian, who also swam at Ottawa Hills and walked on at Michigan State before succumbing to a shoulder injury. “Caleb decided to try diving as a freshman because his friends talked him into it. On the second day of practice our diving coach Ashley Keener shouted across the pool to me, ‘He has six dives,’ and I knew he was going to be special. He qualified for regionals and then made it to the state meet as a freshman.

“Caleb attended dive camps in the summers to work on his skills, and continued to play soccer in the fall and spring. He has put in a lot of time, over 400
hours of practice in the last four seasons, and effort, and he continually challenged himself to be better. He has fought through back, knee, shoulder and ankle injuries over his career.

"Last year he tied for ninth place at the state meet and when it was over he told me that his senior year he was going to be All-State."

He also earned All-American diving consideration, to be judged in June. If he makes the list of the top 100 divers he will be an All-American.

Hekman has made the state finals all four years, working his way up from 36th place as a freshman to this year’s finish of fifth.

“It feels amazing to be an All-State athlete, as I had missed it the year before because when I finished ninth, only top eight are All-State qualifiers,” Hekman explained. “I was determined to get it the following year.

“ar to be on a team that is the best that it has ever been in the history of the program feels amazing.”

Hekman, a three-year captain and all-conference athlete for two seasons, also plays soccer for Ottawa Hills.

“I am set to attend the University of Michigan at their engineering college and have not yet determined if I will continue my soccer career in college, but it is unlikely that I will dive in college due to the large amount of practices, and in order to dive, I would have to change my major and be there for five years.”

He had much to say about his coaches.

“Coach Eve Julian and my diving coach Ashley Keener have helped push me out of my comfort zone and work to be great at something I had never done before.”

Strong State Finishes

Teammates Hoffman, Andrew DeBoer, Adam Kuzee and Dawson Eriksen placed 10th (1:40.38) in the 200 medley relay at the state finals, while Hoffman finished 11th (55.36) in the 100 backstroke and DeBoer placed 11th (1:01.27) in the 100 breaststroke.

Team Records

Hoffman, DeBoer, Kuzee and Eriksen broke the Ottawa Hills record in the 200 medley, and Hoffman and DeBoer also broke the school records in the 100 breaststroke and 100 backstroke, respectively. DeBoer also broke the Rainbow Conference Tier 2 record and Hastings pool record in the 100 breaststroke.

“The three returning swimmers from last season’s state final 200 medley relay (DeBoer, Kuzee and Eriksen) told me that their goal was to break the Rainbow Conference record and place higher in the state meet,” said Julian, who was voted the Michigan Interscholastic Swimming Coaches Association Zone 5 Coach of the Year last season. “With the addition of freshman Backstroker Jonathan Hoffman, they were able to reach both of those goals. The relay earned their state qualifying time during the second meet of the season … and Hoffman was the fastest freshman backstroker in the state.”

Fast and Furious Finish

Julian said though nearly half the team was new to swimming, they had a strong finish.

“We had a challenging season because of the weather and record number of snow days, but the team worked hard when they could and swam really well at the end of the season,” Julian explained. “At the conference meet, we had 95 percent best times at prelims and 70 percent best times at finals. It seemed like we dropped most of our time for the season on those two days.

“This is also one of the tightest teams that I have ever had. They had great leadership with their captains Andrew DeBoer, Dawson Eriksen and Caleb Hekman, and the team was really supportive of each other and the efforts of everyone, not just the state meet guys.”

Academic Awards

DeBoer, Eriksen, Hekman and Ben Vaandrager earned Academic All-America, while DeBoer, Eriksen, Hekman, Vaandrager and Evan Jasinski earned Academic All-State. Academic All-America requires an athlete to be a senior with a cumulative 3.75 GPA (on a 4.0 scale) over seven semesters to qualify. The four swimmers that received the Academic All-America award are all seniors at City High/Middle School, “which makes their accomplishment all that much more impressive,” Julian said. Approximately 2 percent of the graduating seniors around the country even qualify for the award.

The Academic All-State requirement is a 3.65 or better on a 4.0 scale.

The Bengals also earned the NISCA Scholar Team Award: Bronze Level for a combined 3.211 average GPA. The NISCA Scholar team award requires a team average GPA of 3.20 on a 4.0 scale.

“This is the first year that I have had a team that had an average GPA high enough to submit for the award,” said Julian, who works in sales and support for IST, which sells swimming scoreboards and timing systems.

DeBoer, a four-year swimmer at Ottawa Hills and City High/Middle School senior, was proud of the team’s accomplishments this season.

“My freshman year our team was only 18 at its peak, so seeing the massive growth we’ve had is absolutely incredible,” said DeBoer, who qualified for four events at state last year. “Every year we lose seniors who are key parts of our success and we wonder how we’re going to fill the space they left, and every year our veterans make huge improvements to fill that space.”

Leadership Experience

DeBoer, a second-year captain, came into the season with leadership experience.

“Most of the time the boys make it really easy, they listen well, do what coach asks them to do, work hard in practice, and there is hardly ever conflict between teammates that needs intervention.”

Though he “loves” year-round club swimming for the Rapid Area YMCA, DeBoer said every fall he’s “itching to get back in with the Ottawa boys; it’s just a different level of friendship and brotherhood.”

A Little Help from Coach

DeBoer said it’s hard to explain the role Julian has played in his development as a swimmer and person.

“During swim season, I spend more time with her than I do my own parents,” said DeBoer, who has committed to swim for St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. “My sophomore season I injured my shoulder and needed to take time off and rehab. I was worried I was never going to get better, but Eve was there with me every step of the way. I ended up having a great season and haven’t had an injury since. She has been such a good motivator and support for me for the past four years.”

Beyond swimming, DeBoer is heavily involved in choir.

“I sing with the Grand Rapids Symphony Youth Chorus, and I’m in a few different groups at my school,” said DeBoer, who’s been in choir for nearly 10 years.

Noodles, Not Tomatoes

“I’ll eat literally anything except a plain tomato; tomatoes are the worst food ever conceived. As a swimmer, though, noodles are just about the best food you can eat. Noodles are the antithesis of tomatoes.”
Spring Sports

Ottawa Hills & Union High Schools

Baseball
Softball
Boys’ Golf
Girls’ Soccer
Girls’ Tennis
Track & Field

Middle School

Baseball
Softball
Girls’ Soccer
Track and Field

First Tee of West MI Golf

Elementary

Track (2nd - 5th Grades)

Why Play Sports?

Students who participate in extra-curricular after school sports tend to have overall better school performance in the areas of academic achievement, attendance, behavior, involvement, and school spirit. They also tend to go on to college, graduate from college, have higher paying jobs, assume leadership roles, and enjoy a better quality of life. Start now on improving your future. Get involved in school sports!

Calling All Volunteers

During the Spring, GRPS Athletics hosts two large track and field meets at historic Houseman Field. The first meet will be the 4th Annual Elite Challenge on April 20, 2019. This meet continues to grow each and every year and this year there will be over 15 teams that will be in attendance with Ottawa Hills and Union High School as part of the event. As we know a meet of this size is not able occur without the help of volunteers.

If you’re interested in volunteering for the Elite Challenge, go to volunteersignup.org/47JPC

This next meet is the OK Conference White Track Meet held on Friday, May 10th at Houseman Field. This is the Ottawa Hills Conference meet and is a smaller meet with only 7 schools in attendance.

If you’re interested volunteering for the OK Conference, go to volunteersignup.org/FBCP3

As you look at the volunteer sign-up sheets, you will see Lead Official and Support Official needs. If you have knowledge in the event, please sign up for the Lead Official Slot. Descriptions of each responsibility are available upon request. Please email Jolinda Lucas at lucasj@grps.org with any questions.

High School Sports

Are you interested in participating in a sport this Spring? If so, Ottawa Hills and Union High Schools have many opportunities available. Current opportunities include: Softball, Baseball, Girls’ Soccer, Track and Field, Boys’ Golf, Girls Tennis. Please contact Mr. Harris at Ottawa Hills at harrism@grps.org or Mr. Walker at Union at walkerj@grps.org for more information.

Middle School Winter 1 Highlights

During the Winter 1 season for GRPS Athletics we had over 350 student-athletes participate in Boys’ basketball, Competitive Cheer, and Swimming. We had a lot of great performances and improvement throughout the season.

Champions were:
6th Grade Boys’ Basketball – SWCC
7/8 Grade Boys’ Basketball – City
6th Grade Competitive Cheer – U Prep/Museum/GR Montessori
7/8 Grade Competitive Cheer – U Prep/Museum
Swimming – Theme Team with athletes from CA Frost, Harrison, North Park, Museum, Montessori, Shawmut, Zoo, and Blandford

Middle School Winter 2 is Wrapping Up.

Think Spring!

The Girls’ Basketball, Wrestling, and Bowling teams are in action. Girls’ basketball concluded with the championship week beginning April 10. Wrestling City Championships were March 21 at Innovation Central, and Bowling City Finals were on March 21 at Eastbrook Lanes.

It is time to start thinking about our Middle School Spring Sports: Track and Field, Softball, Baseball, Girls Soccer and Golf. For more information please contact your athletic director.

The First Tee Golf Program is coming! Students in eighth and ninth grades will have the opportunity to participate in a one-day clinic at Indian Trails after Spring Break. More information will be available from your physical education teacher and principal.

Elementary Track & Field Coming Soon!

Elementary Track and Field is beginning soon. Registration forms are going out soon and must be returned by April 22. For more information contact your school’s physical education teacher.
GRPS PRESENTS

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Saturday, April 27 11AM-2PM

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