



## Investing in literacy

*Michigan was once considered a leading educational state. The state's innovative approach to education led to the development of the Michigan Curriculum Framework and eventually the Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCE) and the High School Content Expectations (HSCE). Michigan led the way when it came to curriculum and teacher development.*

Teachers were well-versed in content and well trained because they spent so much time “unpacking” the curriculum and developing plans. In 2010, the State decided to join the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) but the rollout was flawed and the training lacked clarity. In 2016 Michigan passed the Read by Grade Three law (third grade reading law), with implementation expected in 2020-21. The law was delayed due to the pandemic; however, the rollout of the law was also flawed. In fact, it put the development of the components of the law on local districts, so there was inconsistency as well as a lack of clarity throughout the state.

The flawed implementation of the CCSS began our downfall. Further, the decision to take away the depth of the reading law caused it to have little impact. Instead of the reading plans and interventions leading to the possibility of a student repeating third grade, the focus shifted simply to intervention and support but that didn't always lead to reading skills. Schools still had to develop Individual Reading Plans and provide supports for struggling students.

Reading is not an easy task for everyone. At Kalkaska Public Schools, we have implemented the Science of Reading so teachers can understand how students learn to read – it's brain-based and not an easy task. Learning to read (and teaching reading) is a challenge. Understanding how the brain receives signals for words and then comprehending those words ... takes time. We have used LETRS training which is an extensive and comprehensive course on reading. It's a several hour investment for each teacher and administrator. Truth is, we are **all** reading teachers. If a children cannot read, they will be disadvantaged in every single subject and learning will be a continuous struggle. Reading matters.

Investments in the science of reading and a consistent approach across the state is extremely important. KPS leaders are

See Pg. 7

### INSIDE THIS EDITION

#### BULLETIN

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**BOX HOLDER**  
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# Celebrating kindness daily

*RCE students enjoy festive month of activities*

Our classrooms were transformed into a sea of festive reds and pinks in February as students and staff celebrated “Fun Friday” with a focus on kindness and community. From displaying creative handmade bags to exchanging thoughtful Valentine cards and snacks, the day was centered on celebrating one another through games and crafts. This festive day capped off an energetic spirit week, highlighted by a “Twin Day” that brought double the fun as students and staff matched up in coordinated outfits to celebrate our school spirit.

## Winter Wonders at Recess: Creativity in the Snow

With the generous snowfall we’ve received this winter, our playground has been transformed into a hub of seasonal creativity and teamwork. During recess, our 5th-grade students have been busy

engineering impressive snowmen, showing off both their artistic skills and collaborative spirit. Their imaginative—and often hilarious—designs have even included a “bodybuilder” snowman complete with a full set of abs! Not to be outdone, our Kindergarteners have also been embracing the winter weather, filling their recess time with laughter as they try their hands at building their very own snowy creations.

## Badge Buddies: Building Connections One Lunch at a Time

Students from all grade levels at RCE enjoy a special lunch with Deputy Rohring each month. This experience gives students a chance to ask questions, share conversations, and build positive relationships with a community helper in a relaxed setting. Having an officer of

the law visit is more than just a special event; it’s an opportunity to build trust, encourage positive relationships, and help students feel safe in their community. Students can also ask questions about the role of law enforcement, and see officers as approachable and supportive members of their neighborhood. We appreciate you, Deputy Rohring!



# Read at home every day

*Fifteen minutes of reading makes a difference!*

Even though winter is still here, we are beginning to see signs that spring is on the way. Longer days, brighter sunshine, and growing excitement fill our classrooms. February is a month full of kindness, learning, and love for our school community.

## Winter Reminder

Please continue sending ...

- ★ Warm coats, hats, and gloves
- ★ Snow boots (if needed)
- ★ Labeled items to prevent mix-ups
- ★ We go outside whenever weather permits

## Looking Ahead to Spring

We are beginning to plan: the following important spring activities ...

- ★ Spring classroom projects
- ★ March is Reading Month activities
- ★ Earth Day learning

Spring may not be here just yet, but we are growing and learning every day.

## Reading at Home

Just 15 minutes of reading each night helps students grow strong reading skills. Try reading together and asking:

- ★ What happened first?
- ★ Who are the characters?
- ★ What do you think will happen next?

Thank you for your continued support. Even in the chilly days of February, wonderful things are blooming at Birch Street Elementary!

## Events

- ★ March 25 — Evening Parent Teacher Conferences, K - 5
- ★ March 27 — No School - Spring Break Begins - End of Marking Period 3



# Chivalry comes to fifth grade

## Fifth Grade's Epic Journey

To celebrate our fifth graders epic journey through *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, students gathered for a special screening of the film adaptation in KHS auditorium. In a nod to the hero's quest for honor, the 5th grade held a special "Knighting Ceremony," and Principal Moore read a decree highlighting responsibility and honor, and students were "knighted" with a ceremonial wooden sword. Each knighted student was bestowed with a unique "Knight Name" associated with the book. The ceremony was used to celebrate academic achievement.

## March is Reading Month

Throughout March, students participate in many reading-oriented activities.

One of the top activities is Flashlight Reading. Students start the day out with quiet reading time in the darkened gym. Flashlights are provided, although some students choose to bring their own. The students have time to enjoy their favorite book under the glow of a flashlight.

## StarLab

National Parks Service Rangers from Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore visited and talked with 5th grade students about constellations and their origin stories inside a "StarLab." Rangers also talked to students about light pollution. They examined how strategies to limit light pollution help to save electricity and also increase constellation visibility.

## Staff Development

What do teachers do when students don't have school but staff does? Teachers work on professional development. At our last PD day, the staff worked on learning intentions and success criteria — two components of a lesson that define what the class is learning and what students need to do to show they have mastered the concepts. Staff worked with ISD consultants to help define what is being learned in student-appropriate language. They also helped to develop the success criteria that students will demonstrate that shows their understanding of the standard. This helps teachers understand where adjustments need to be made in the lesson to ensure the students' success.



# Student sells 101 boxes of candy bars to support KMS

## Exploring Ancient Civilization

Students in Mrs. Athearn's 6th Grade social studies class recently studied the Indus River Valley Civilization through a creative classroom project designed to simulate the challenges faced by archaeologists.

Because the civilization's glyphs remain largely undeciphered, students created their own symbolic seals representing ancient professions using only glyph-style drawings. Classmates then attempted to interpret the symbols and guess each profession. The lesson continued with students crafting stamp seals from homemade clay to mark their "ancient" documents. Although experiments with wax sealing proved difficult and often stuck to the seals or fell off, students persisted through the challenges. By

the end of the day, many students successfully attached their seals to scroll-style messages using hot glue, creating breakable stamps that friends or family members could open just like ancient letters. The activity helped bring ancient history to life while encouraging creativity and problem-solving.

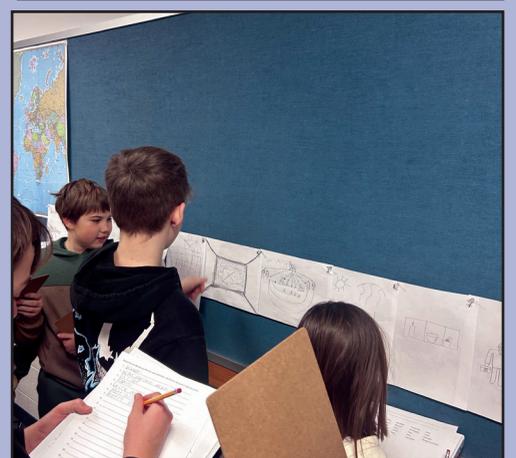
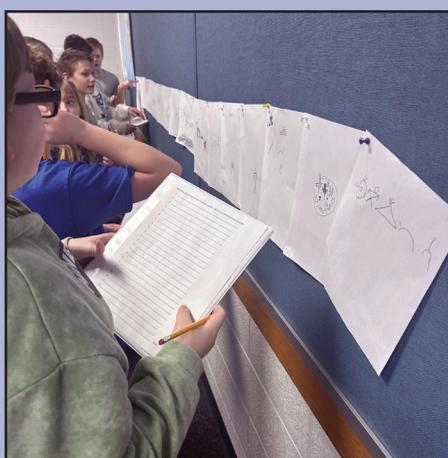
## Candy Bar Competition Sweet

Students recently participated in a successful school candy bar sale, with several students earning recognition for their outstanding efforts. The fundraiser encouraged students to work hard while helping support school programs. Bentley Biallas was the top seller, earning the \$200 grand prize after selling an impressive 101 boxes of candy bars. Bentley sold the most for the third consecutive year — 60 in 2024, 80 in 2025. Jadeyn Myers and

Benjamin Borden tied for second place, each selling seven boxes and earning \$100 prizes for their efforts. Every student who sold at least one box of candy bars was entered into a drawing for a \$100 prize. Romilly Smith won the drawing and received \$100. Congratulations to all of the students who participated and helped make the fundraiser a success!

## Honoring Our SRO

Students and staff celebrated School Resource Officer Appreciation Day on February 15, by recognizing the dedication of our School Resource Officer, Deputy Rohring, who works each day to keep our school safe, build positive relationships with students, and support our school community. Thank you for everything you do!



## A small step now, a big win later

This spring, we're rolling out something new, online athletics registration through Arbiter! Think of this as our "soft launch," which is just a fancy way of saying we're using the spring season to work out the kinks before this becomes the standard process for the 2026-27 school year. So why the change? A few good reasons: our coaches will have important athlete information right at their fingertips, our new athletic trainer will have the electronic records they need, and it just makes everything run smoother for everyone involved. Good stuff all around.

Here's what you need to know as a parent: You only create an account once — it works from Middle School all the way through to Senior Year. First-time setup takes about 30 minutes per athlete. We know, we know — nobody loves extra steps. But this is a one-time investment that pays off for years. It works on a laptop or mobile device, so do it wherever is easiest for you.

### Ready to get started?

We're all learning this together, and we appreciate your patience as we make this transition. Questions? Reach out to the Athletics Office at the High School — we're happy to help!

<https://students.arbitersports.com/programs/kalkaska-high-school-athletics-2025-2026-registration>

Need a walkthrough? Check out these tutorials: <https://web.enable.us/room/db6394ea-8d1f-4359-806f-a8308ee72e4b>



## Meet our book twins: **VERA & HADLEY**



### WHAT ARE BOOK TWINS?

When two students check out the same book from the library and read it together, we call them **book twins!** While Hadley's favorite color is teal and Vera's favorite color is red, they both list the *Pizza and Taco* books as some of their favorites. They both love reading in Mrs. Farrier's class and dancing.

### WOULD YOU RATHER:

Have a tail like a monkey,  
or ears like a rabbit?

**EARS! EARS!**

Talk to animals or read minds?

**READ MINDS!  
TALK TO ANIMALS!**

Breathe underwater or fly?

**BREATHE UNDERWATER!  
BREATHE UNDERWATER!**

### WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT HAVING A BOOK TWIN?

**IT'S FUN TO LOOK AT ALL  
THE BOOKS AND PICK  
OUT A BOOK TOGETHER!**

**IT'S FUN THAT I GET TO  
READ WITH MY FRIEND!**

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## Kalkaska Blazers Fight Song

Smash right through that line big Blue.

Watch the points keep growing.

Blazer teams are bound to win.

They're fighting with the vim.

Rah, rah, rah!

See that line, it's weakening.

We're going to win this game.

Fight, fight, rah, team fight!

Victory for Blue and White!

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**Continued from Pg. 1**

comfortable with the state guiding us in this important project. Too often, the state leaves development and implementation up to Intermediate School Districts and/or local districts without explicit clarity, so throughout the state there are different levels of implementation. Some districts have the resources for implementation, but not all do.

We have to understand this is not an overnight fix. We've been sidetracked over the years, but by taking intentional steps and working with the state, we can get back on track. Michigan's academic performance scores have been stagnant for years. Kalkaska Public Schools has great teachers doing great work who are well trained. However, the teacher shortage has affected nearly all school districts. Beyond that, students who have completed an education program at the university level often are not prepared to "teach reading" using the science of reading, so there is more training that necessary. Hope exists, though.

Focusing on literacy would be a great investment for the state. Moreover, Governor Whitmer and State Superintendent Dr. Glenn Maleyko are working together to implement professional learning and support. Michigan had a solid curriculum but was derailed by the pursuit of the Race to the Top funding in 2009 and adopted the CCSS in order to be able to apply. Michigan was also working toward ensuring that all students were able to successfully read by the end of third grade, but again, abandoned that. We need to develop momentum, stick with it, and make Michigan an educational leader once again.

**#BLAZERPRIDE**

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**BLAZERS**

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# ONCE A BLAZER ALWAYS A BLAZER

## Welcome to the Blazer Family Conklin named head gridiron coach

Kalkaska Public Schools is proud to announce that Darren Conklin has been selected as the next head varsity football coach for the Blazers. Darren brings an impressive track record, a deep love for the game, and — most importantly — a genuine commitment to the young men who will wear the Blazer uniform. We could not be more excited to welcome him and his family to our community.

Darren comes to Kalkaska with a proven record of building programs the right way. As varsity head coach at Plainwell High School for a decade, he compiled an impressive 56–44 record with playoff appearances in seven of those ten seasons and eight consecutive winning years. He was named Wolverine Conference Coach of the Year in 2014, developed multiple all-state players, and helped 20-plus athletes advance to play at the next level. Beyond the wins, Darren built a program known for discipline, fundamentals, and a culture that young men wanted to be a part of.

What stood out immediately in the hiring process was Darren’s vision for a complete program — one that connects youth football, middle school development, and varsity in a unified direction. His approach is built on accountability, strong communication with parents and staff, and a physical, disciplined identity designed for deep playoff runs. Darren has already been making his presence known in Kalkaska. This fall, he took it upon himself to attend Blazer athletic events across multiple sports — watching our student-athletes compete in person, and learning who we are as a school and community. That initiative speaks volumes about his character.

Kalkaska is a place where being involved in athletics matters, and where a coach becomes part of the fabric of a community. Darren

**Conklin’s Vision: A program that connects youth football, middle school development, and varsity in a unified direction. His approach is built on accountability, strong communication with parents and staff, and a physical, disciplined identity designed for deep playoff runs.**

Conklin understands that. He’s the kind of person who shows up, does it right, and represents the school with integrity every day. We are thrilled to have him leading our football program and look forward to the energy, purpose, and passion he will bring to our student-athletes, coaches, and Blazer fans. Please join us in giving Coach Conklin and his family a warm Kalkaska welcome!



### Winter Sports Wrap-Up

Winter sports are officially in the books for 25-26! The pep band and drumline have packed up their instruments and are turning their focus toward festival competitions — and if you’ve seen them perform, you know they’re going to bring it. The dance team has hung up the sparkles and poms for now, but wow, did they show up all season long. Both groups brought an energy to our halftime shows that made every game much more fun.

The wrestlers have put away the headgear, kneepads, and shoes — but don’t let that fool you. They’re already locked in, getting stronger and faster with district and individual titles in their sights. Watch out.

And Blazer Basketball? Coach Kelli and Coach Eric Wilde are building something real here. Both the boys and girls teams picked up first-round district wins on the road this postseason — that’s not easy, and it matters. Both teams fell in the semifinal round, but the trajectory of this program is pointing up, and I genuinely believe the best is ahead.

To every coach, athlete, and fan who showed up this winter — thank you. The support in our gyms, in our community, and on the road did not go unnoticed. Not even a little bit.

