

WELCOME BACK

Bring the *HEAT* in 2026–2027

Here we go into a brand new school year. Wow! Where did summer go? Well, now that we have six weeks completed in the 2026–2027 school year, it makes sense that summer slid away! Welcome back!

What's New

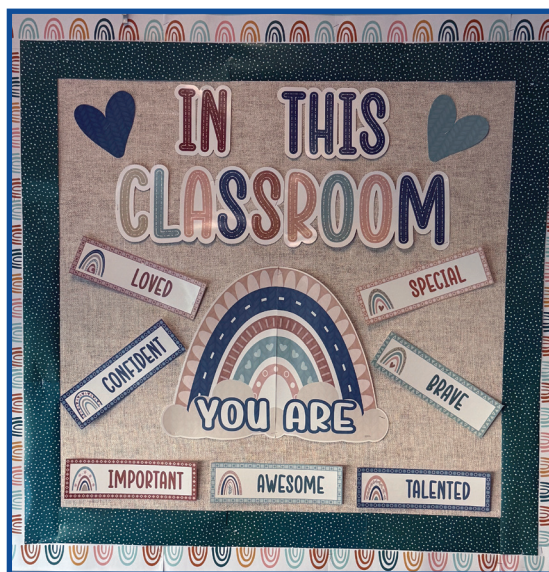
What's new? Several staff members have joined KPS. Rapid City Elementary is focused on family–style community learning. Wood shop has returned to the high school. Oh, the list goes on and on.

Building Project

We are meeting to discuss a potential new bond proposal that may come to the community as soon as next May. We will keep you updated on its progress in the *Blazer Bulletin*.

Headlee Rollback

A General Election ballot item will ask voters to approve a 1 mill addition to the KPS operating levy that is already capped at 18 mills overall for “Non-Homestead” properties.



That levy, last renewed by voters in 2022, had an extra 1 mill approved alongside the 18 mills in order to offset future headlee rollbacks. Since then, yearly rollbacks have nearly used up that 1 mill cushion. With

the current 18 mill levy in effect through 2031 another 1 mill should keep the 18 mills maintained, which is the maximum allowed by law.

Taxpayers who pay this particular levy are owners of second homes, vacation, investment and commercial properties. **Principal residences and qualified farms are exempt.**

As a reminder, the 18 mill levy is for operational purposes and represents the district's single largest funding source. Funds from this levy are combined with State Aid to comprise the per-pupil funding needed to operate. If the 18 mills is reduced by rollbacks, the state will not make up the lost funding to KPS.

In short, please know that this ballot proposal simply asks for a continuation of the existing 18 mill levy paid by “non-homestead” taxpayers for the past 32 years.



INSIDE THIS EDITION

BULLETIN

Kalkaska Public Schools
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Kalkaska, Michigan 49646

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A River Runs Through It ...

Rapid City Elementary students and staff are taking a fresh approach to what learning looks like and making intentional use of what's already around us.

Our students have a forest to explore, a river running through the campus, a garden to rebuild, and a community full of opportunities to learn. Project Learning Tree, our new outdoor curriculum, is helping us connect these resources to what students are learning while creating more hands-on learning experiences.

To put this approach into action, we have divided our school year into four themes: Harvest Days, Winter Survival, Stewardship Days, and Adventure Days. Each quarter will give students opportunities to explore, create, problem-solve, and learn in new ways. We'll kick things off with Harvest Days, October

ecosystems, learn about beekeeping, try their hand at food making, and lead campus tours for their families. We're excited to try new things, get our hands dirty, and build traditions that are uniquely RCE.

Community Support Helps Bring Our Vision to Life

Our school has received support from communities both near and far. The Elk Rapids Art & Connection and the Three Lakes Association provided generous donations that are helping us turn ideas into opportunities for our students to learn, explore, and create beyond the classroom walls. These investments will have an impact beyond this school year as we break ground for our school's fruit orchard, establish a STEM/Discovery classroom, and provide students with new tools to enhance forest and water studies. We are grateful for partnerships that are helping us bring our vision for RCE to life.

RCE Runners Hit the Trail

Our cross country runners have been putting in the work this fall and have completed two races so far. We are proud

of our runners for taking on the challenge of "running for fun" and supporting one another along the way. Their effort shows what we want our students to learn: progress isn't linear. Sometimes it's fast, sometimes it's slow, and sometimes it takes a lot of effort to reach the finish line. No matter what the clock says, finishing something difficult is worth celebrating. We are proud of you, runners!



12-16, as students explore orchard



Blazing into a Great School Year

What an incredible first month it has been at Birch Street Elementary! Our Blazers have returned to the halls with high energy, huge smiles, and a fantastic attitude toward learning.

Teachers and staff have spent these first few weeks establishing classroom routines, launching our core subjects, and helping students build strong connections with their peers. From the playground to the classrooms, the Blazer spirit is shining bright. Thank you to all our parents and guardians for helping make this transition back to school so smooth!

Blazer Pro-Tips for an Awesome School Year!

- ★ Be a Classroom Helper: Raise your hand to clean up, hold the door, or help a friend—small kindnesses go a long way!
- ★ Organize Your Folder: Keep “Return to School” papers on one side and

“Keep at Home” papers on the other so nothing gets lost.

- ★ Try Something New: Pick up a new book at the library, play with a new friend at recess, or raise your hand even if you aren’t 100% sure of the answer!

Please Remember

If you are trying to reach the Birch Street Office for your kindergartener, First or Second grader, please call 231-258-8629.

If you are trying to reach the Kalkaska Upper Elementary Office for your Third, Fourth or Fifth grader, please call 231-258-9146.

Morning Drop-Off

Students may not be dropped off before 7:30 a.m. Doors are locked and staff are not present to ensure student safety.

Afternoon Dismissal

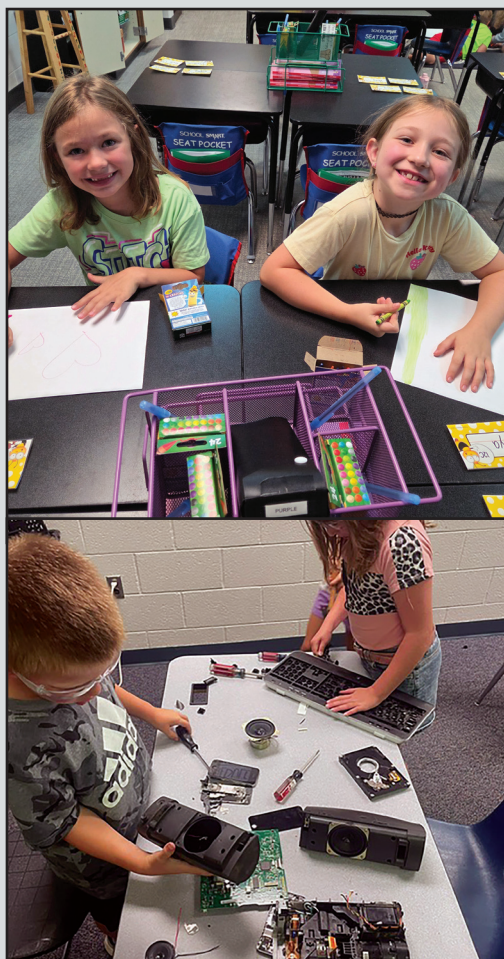
Office pick-up to avoid the car line is prohibited. This is to be used when there are appointments and/or family emergencies. Our Staff are working very hard to ensure that every student gets to where they need to be at this time and pulling students makes this process very difficult.

Please Welcome New Staff at BSE

Ms. Kluft - first grade; Mrs. Steinhoff - first grade.

Events

- ★ October 22 – 1/2-day students – K-5 Parent Teacher Conferences
- ★ October 23 – No School
- ★ October 30 – End of 1st Marking Period
- ★ November 2 – No School – Teacher Work Day



Blazers Bringing the Heat

We've had a great start to the year here at Kalkaska Upper Elementary! Staff and students have worked hard to get back into routines, learn more about one another, become familiar with new classes, procedures, and expectations, and build strong relationships within our school community. These first few weeks have been filled with learning, growing, and building the foundation of a successful school year!

A peak in the classroom

Our teachers work hard to meet each student's needs. A key component of this is our daily greetings and affirmations to let the students know that we care about them and want them to be successful. Here is a look at what some of our teachers have done in their classrooms to

remind students of just that.

Mr. Burkam's Science and Technology students have been working on a learning lab, Gadget Garage. Students get to explore computers, devices, and gadgets while practicing technology skills, troubleshooting, and problem-solving.

Mr. Burkam shared, "I've been very lucky to receive donations from members of our community that have helped make the Gadget Garage possible! We're also actively looking for more old computer towers that students can safely take apart, explore, and learn from—so if anyone has old towers they'd like to donate, we'd love to put them to use!"

A few reminders

Our doors are locked until 7:30 a.m. — we do not have staff present in the building until then. Please do not drop your students off before then — it's getting to the time of year where it's chilly in the morning!

Office pick-up to avoid the car line is prohibited. This is to be used when there are appointments and/or family emergencies. We

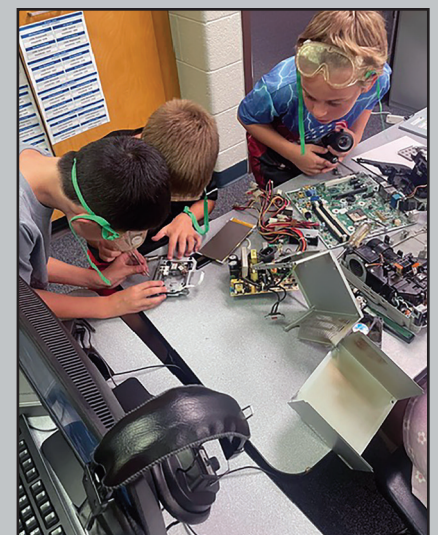
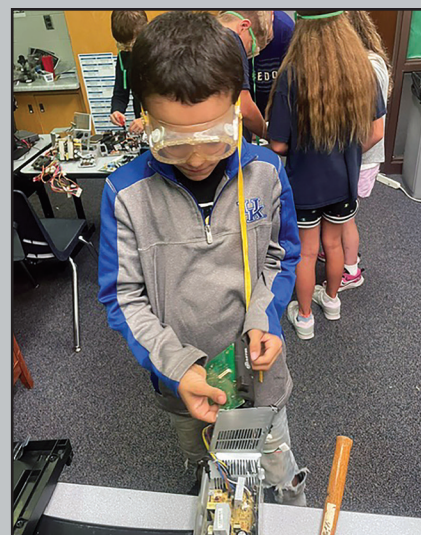
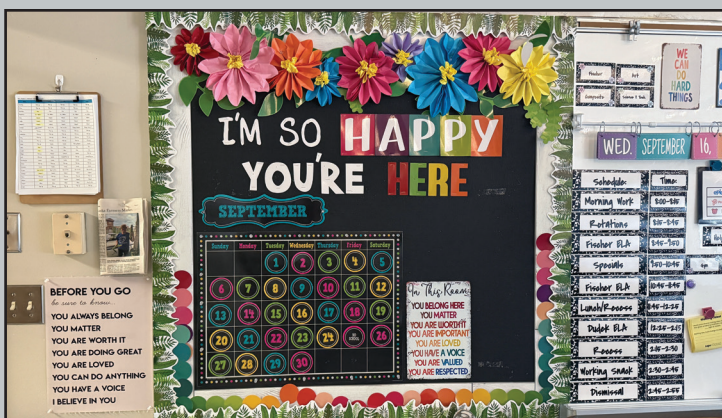


have staff working very hard to ensure that every student gets to where they need to be at this time and pulling students makes this process very difficult. To reach our office for your third, fourth or fifth grader, please call (231) 258-9146.

Kalkaska Upper Elementary is excited to welcome our new staff members: Mrs. Lombardi – third grade; Mrs. Creighton – fourth grade; Miss Wilkinson – fifth grade; Mrs. Wakefield – secretary.

Events

- ★ October 9 – Picture Day
- ★ October 22 – 1/2 day students – K–5 Parent Teacher Conferences
- ★ October 23 – No School
- ★ October 30 – End of 1st Marking Period
- ★ November 2 – No School – Teacher Work Day



Shine a Light on Our Staff

Every day at KMS, many people work behind the scenes to help our students learn, grow, and succeed. Among those people are our dedicated paraprofessionals who play an important role in supporting students — both in and out of the classroom. We want to shine a light on some of our paras and give our community a chance to get to know them a little better.

Ms. Krissy has been part of the KMS family for four years. Her favorite part of the job is seeing the results of the work she does with students and, most importantly, the connections she builds with them. Those relationships are a big part of what makes working with students so rewarding.

Ms. Andrews is beginning her first year at the middle school, but she brings an impressive 18 years of experience in education with her. Her favorite part of the job is getting to know students and building relationships with them. She enjoys being someone students know is in their corner, supporting them, encouraging them, and watching them grow into the people they are becoming. Outside of school, Ms. Andrews has coached softball for nearly a decade. She also admits that she is “...more competitive than I look!”

Ms. Kimmie is in her third year at KMS. She especially enjoys watching students grow academically and socially throughout the school year. Working one-on-one with her special education students and celebrating their progress, both big and small, is one of her favorite parts of the job. Ms. Kimmie is also continuing her own education as she attends college to become a special education teacher. She looks forward to continuing to learn and grow

alongside her students. GO BLAZERS!

Mrs. Bower joined the district as a paraprofessional in 2025 after spending a couple of years as a substitute teacher. Before moving up north, she spent 17 years working in a school district in the metro Detroit area, gaining experience with students at every level from preschool through high school. Her wide range of experience has given her a unique perspective on working with students of all



ages.

Mr. Ray has been part of the school community for many years. He originally started as a custodian with GRBS in 2012 and has now been a paraprofessional for eight years. Outside of school, Mr. Ray is an archery instructor as well as a youth sword-fighting instructor.

While each of our paraprofessionals has a different background and their own unique interests, they all share something important: a commitment to helping our students. Whether they are providing academic support, encouraging a student through a difficult day, celebrating an accomplishment, or simply being someone a student can count on, our paraprofessionals make a difference every day. We are grateful for everything they do for our students and our school.

Welcoming New Faces to KMS

As we recognize the staff members who have already made KMS such a special place, we also want to welcome some new faces to our school community!

Please join us in welcoming Mrs. Hall, who will be teaching 6th grade math, Mr. Wojdan, who will be teaching 7th grade social studies, and Mrs. Cherwinski, who will be teaching 8th grade math.

We are excited to have them join the KMS family and look forward to the experience, knowledge, and energy they will bring to our students and classrooms.



Welcome to our new teachers.

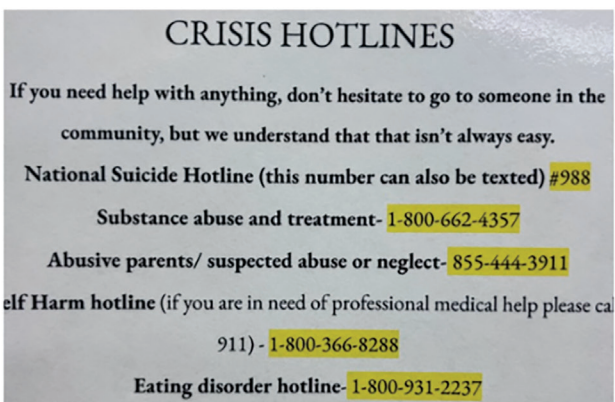
SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH IS A VERY SERIOUS TOPIC, BUT IT RAISES AWARENESS AND REDUCES SHAME BY CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER. IT IS NORMAL TO STRUGGLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH. EVERYBODY HAS DIFFERENT FEELINGS AND DIFFERENT WAYS OF HANDLING EMOTION, AND THAT IS OKAY. ONE THING THAT IS NEEDED FOR SOMEBODY WHO IS STRUGGLING IS SPEAKING TO SOMEONE, EVEN IF IT'S JUST A SIMPLE "HELLO." THIS COULD BE FRIENDS, FAMILY MEMBERS, OR ANOTHER TRUSTED PERSON. REACHING OUT CAN HELP SOMEONE FEEL SUPPORTED. PAY ATTENTION TO THE PEOPLE WHO ARE AROUND YOU, CHECK UP ON THEM REGULARLY, AND MAKE THEM FEEL LIKE A PERSON WHO MATTERS, NOT A PLACEHOLDER.

by Olivia Driggett & Arabella Roman



Hope Squad: Jace Robinson, Mr. Guggemos, Gabby Dougherty, Hunter Carrier, Elizabeth Emery, Parker Fondren, Edi England, Alexis Kniss, Sydnee Haver, Marissa Manchester, Courtney Borden, Sophie-Anne Scott, Alana Booth



I SPOKE WITH SYDNEE HAVER, THE EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT, WHO IS ALSO A MEMBER OF HOPE SQUAD. I ASKED HER WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE IN HOPE SQUAD. SYDNEE SAID, "IT IS A VERY EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE, AND I CAN REALIZE THE STRUGGLE, AND I THINK THAT THIS IS A GOOD COMMUNITY TO WORK WITH."

THEN I TALKED TO THE HOPE SQUAD ADVISOR, MR GUGGEMOS. I ASKED HIM IF HE THINKS HOPE SQUAD IS BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY.

"I THINK SO, YES," HE SAID. "I THINK THEY REALIZE THAT IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO HAVE ADULTS AND PEERS THAT THEY KNOW, THAT THEY TRUST TO TALK ABOUT THIS." I THEN ASKED IF ANY OF THE STUDENTS IN HOPE SQUAD HAD SOMEBODY REACH OUT TO THEM TO TALK. MR. GUGGEMOS SAID, "LAST YEAR, WE DID. WE HAD A COUPLE HERE AT THE HIGH SCHOOL."

I TALKED TO KAELEI CHESEBRO, A SENIOR HERE AT KALKASKA HIGH SCHOOL. I ASKED KAELEI IF SHE HAD EVER HAD SOMEONE CLOSE TO HER BE AFFECTED BY SUICIDE OR IF SHE HAD KNOWN SOMEONE WHO STRUGGLED WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH. KAELEI SAID, "YES, MYSELF. I WAS SAD, AND I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO FEEL ABOUT IT. PEOPLE AT SCHOOL CAN BE RUDE IN SO MANY WAYS."

I THEN ASKED HER WHO HELPED HER OVERCOME WHAT SHE WAS FEELING. SHE REPLIED, "I HELPED MYSELF A LOT, AND MY FAMILY DID ALSO, BUT MOSTLY ELLA (HER BESTFRIEND)."

KAELEI ALSO SAID, "IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, TALK TO A FRIEND, AND IF YOU NEED TO, TALK TO THE SUICIDE HOTLINE."

This page produced by the KHS journalism class under the leadership of Ms. Gina Dellate.



The Kalkaska Area Educational Foundation

Supports Kalkaska Public Schools by awarding Senior Scholarships and Teacher Grants



STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES at Teen Health Corner

Primary Care and Mental Health services for kids, teens and young adults

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

October 10

About 1 in 7 teenagers globally experience mental health challenges like anxiety or depression. Yet, because of the stigma surrounding mental health, many young people suffer in silence, worried that speaking up makes them look "weak" or "dramatic" and not believing that is A HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

Taking care of your mind doesn't mean you have to have everything figured out. It starts with small, daily choices:

- Schedule intentional breaks from social media.
- Set boundaries and take a rest day if school, sports, work, or social obligations are overwhelming.
- Take a short walk outside, blast favorite music, or do a creative hobby to significantly lower cortisol (the stress hormone) levels.
- Find a trusted friend, a family member, a counselor, or a teacher and tell them how you are actually doing.

Teen Health Corner has three locations that offer mental health services, please reach out. Checking in on friends is just as important as checking in on yourself.

CONTACT US:

(231) 258-7791 Kalkaska
419 South Coral St, Kalkaska

(231) 258-7922 KMS-E3
Behavior Health services ONLY
Kalkaska Middle School
1700 West Kalkaska St, Kalkaska

(231) 369-2000 Forest Area
7741 Shippy Rd, Fife Lake

Three convenient locations





Reading Time is Family Time

Every evening, put smartphones and tablets in a basket, bring out your books, and read for at least

20 MINUTES.

Books out. Screens away.

Fewer kids read for fun today than at any time in the past 40 years. The Nation’s Report Card found that only 14% of 13-year-olds read for fun almost every day, down from 35% in 1984. Meanwhile, tweens now spend more than five hours a day on screens outside of school.

That matters in Kalkaska, because our kids who read for fun are the kids who read well. Researchers have also linked early reading for pleasure to better focus, memory, and overall mental health in the teen years.

Here’s the good news: this is one of the few school problems families can fix at home, for free. Michigan classrooms went phone-free during class time this fall. Home is the next step.

This month, try one thing: pick a 20-minute window each evening when every smartphone and tablet in the house—including the grown-ups’—go in a basket and books come out. Not sure what your child would enjoy? Stop by the library. Finding great books for kids is our very favorite job.

Let’s do great books together.

— Your Neighbors at the Kalkaska County Library

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Kalkaska Alternative Program — 258-2777

Josh England, Dean of Students

BLAZERS

Blazer Bulletin

Published by KPS

Superintendent: Rick Heitmeyer

The Blazer Bulletin is published during the school year from September—June. If you have any suggestions, or questions, please contact the office at (231) 258-9109 between the hours of 8 a.m.—4 p.m. Editorial assistance provided by Kalkaska County Library Director John P. Roberts.

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Tracy Dimon, Secretary	4200
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Early Childhood Learning Center — 258-0257

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Samantha Wagner, Early Childhood Specialist	8102
Jessica Hearn, Secretary	8101

Kalkaska Upper Elementary — 258-9146

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Kaitlyn Wakefield, Secretary	5107

Rapid City Elementary — 331-6121

Kevin Malbouef, Dean of Students	6103
Brittany Wilson, Secretary	6101

ONCE A BLAZER

ALWAYS A BLAZER

Sports Teams are Bringing the Heat

Students working to be their best every single day

Fall is in full swing and our Blazers are bringing it every night of the week! From the gridiron to the links to the cross country trails, our student-athletes are competing with heart and grit, growing in confidence, and bringing the HEAT.

Football

Under new head coach Darren Conklin, the Blazers are improving each and every week. This squad has battled through bumps and bruises, but their fight never wavers — and that toughness is building a foundation that could surprise some teams later in the season.

Volleyball

Our volleyball squads bring it every single night. These girls are fierce competitors, improving with each match as they head into a tough conference schedule — and they're ready for the challenge.

Girls Golf

New head coach Matt Olds has a solid group of seven young ladies making their mark on the links each week. Two golfers have already punched their ticket to regionals, and Coach Olds is on the hunt for one more to join them.

Boys Soccer

The Blazers have shown tremendous improvement this season, shocking a lot of teams along the way. They're holding on in the Northern Shores Conference, with the next stretch of games being all league contests. The program hasn't shown this much promise in years — kudos to Head Coach Josh Wakefield and his staff for all their hard work.

Cross Country

Our Cross Country teams have been solid all season. Runner times are dropping as fast as the September evening temperatures! The peak of the season is still ahead, and Coach Brown has his runners moving in the right direction.

Weight Room Shout-Out

The Athletic Department would like to give a shout-out to the KHS PE Department for supporting our student-athletes in the weight room during the school day, and to Mr. Wilkinson for helping open the weight room before school for those athletes who can't fit it into their day. These athletes will start to see the gains from this effort — in strength, flexibility, and balance — throughout the school year.

