

KALKASKA BLAZER BULLETIN

September 2023
Vol. III | No. 1
#GoBlazers



WHAT A WONDERFUL YEAR!

OPEN FOR BUSINESS KALKASKA UPPER ELEMENTARY

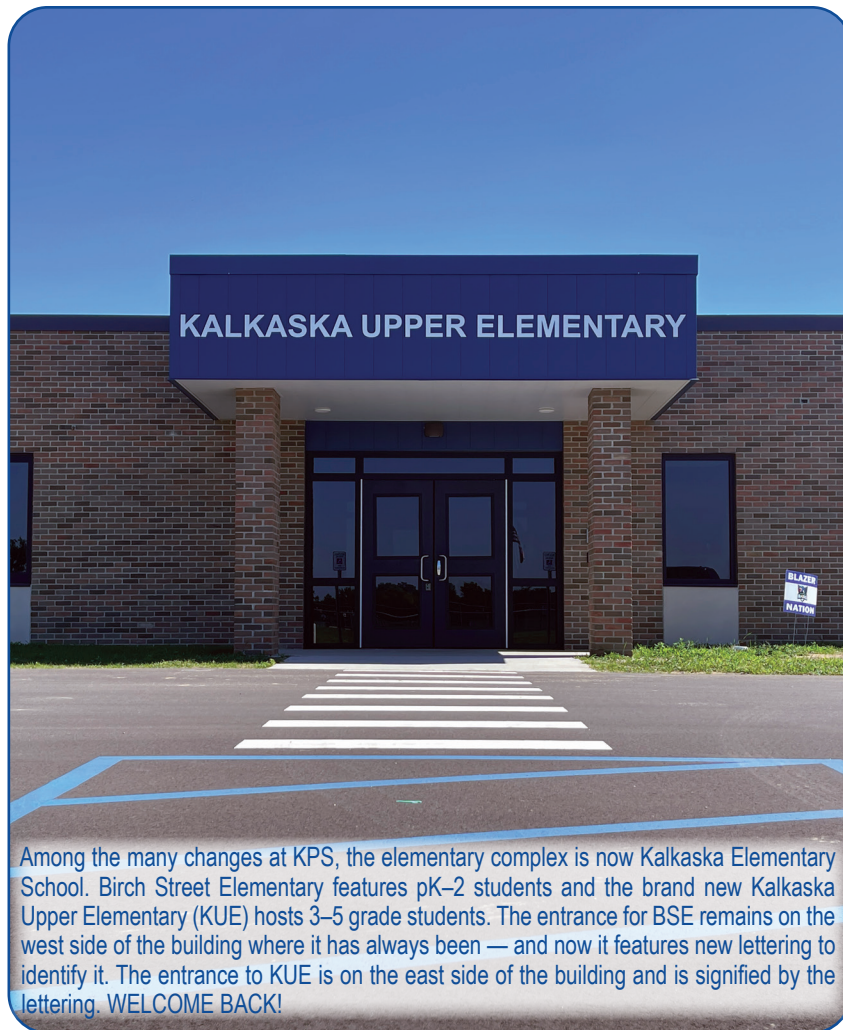
Welcome back to school, Blazer family and friends! We are so excited for the new year. Students have new opportunities, new teachers, and new friends. Of course, it's time for some changes ...

Fourth and fifth grade students will now be educated at Kalkaska Upper Elementary School on the expanded campus of Kalkaska Elementary School which also features Birch Street Elementary. Birch Street Elementary will be the “lower elementary,” featuring pre-kindergarten through second grade students, and KUE will house the third through fifth grade students in the “upper elementary” section.

On Wednesday, June 14, Cherry Street Intermediate School closed its doors for the last time after several years as the Kalkaska fourth and fifth grade building. Renovations are in process to turn the building into one of the area’s only state-of-the-art early childhood centers.

New drop-off and pick-up procedures are in place. The transition to a new drop off/pick up system was necessary as several additional students will be educated in the complex.

Mrs. Arica Zenner will remain as the BSE principal and Mr. Ryan Moore will transition from the middle school to become the first principal at KUE —however, he previously did serve as the CSI principal. Mr. Scott Morey joins the administrative team as the Kalkaska Middle School principal.



Among the many changes at KPS, the elementary complex is now Kalkaska Elementary School. Birch Street Elementary features pK-2 students and the brand new Kalkaska Upper Elementary (KUE) hosts 3-5 grade students. The entrance for BSE remains on the west side of the building where it has always been — and now it features new lettering to identify it. The entrance to KUE is on the east side of the building and is signified by the lettering. WELCOME BACK!



A sneak peak at what the new classrooms look like at KUE.



The band, under the direction of new director Ms. Samantha Ward, played at the annual Blazer Bash.

INSIDE THIS EDITION

BULLETIN

Kalkaska Public Schools
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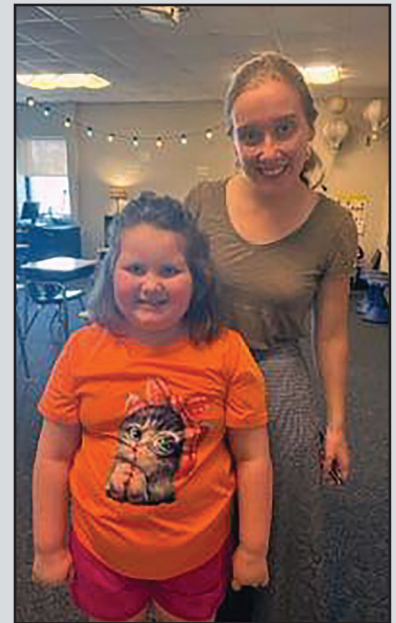
Rapid City Elementary Rockstar welcome

Returning Rapid City Rockstars and new Rockstars were welcomed into a warm, comfortable, fun loving learning environment. Rockstars were all smiles their first week back!

Rockstars are not only excited about reuniting with each other, but we are celebrating the addition of two new faces that are already helping us shine brighter. Here is a Rockstar! Welcome to Ms. Freeman (1st /2nd Grade) and Mrs. Piatek (Special Education). We are so happy to have you!

Rapid City Elementary Parent Teacher Organization is gearing up for an eventful school year! With fresh ideas already proposed prior to the beginning of the school year. Our PTO is sure to host a few more fun successful events this year. Village Market Community receipts began Tuesday, September 5. Start collecting those grocery and gas receipts and turn them into the school office to support your local Rockstars.

The first PTO meeting will be held on Thursday, September 14 at 6 p.m. in the RCE library. Child care will be provided! If you haven't yet signed up to volunteer some time to our PTO or PTO events, it is not too late. You can become a PTO member anytime.



#BLAZERPRIDE

BSE changes procedures, expectations

BSE, KUE on one site

If you are trying to reach the Birch Street Office for your preschooler, kindergartener, first or second grader, please call **231-258-8629**.

Morning Drop-Off

- Students may not be dropped off before 7:30 a.m. Doors are locked and staff is not present to ensure student safety.
- If you need morning care prior to 7:30 am, please consult a staff member about morning Latchkey.
- Any student getting dropped off by entering the car line must exit the vehicle on the right hand side, in the right lane. For safety reasons, the left lane is ONLY to be used to exit the car line after your student has exited the vehicle.

If you are trying to reach the Kalkaska Upper Elementary Office for your third, fourth or fifth grader, please call **231-258-9146**.

We appreciate continued patience and understanding as we are still undergoing construction, merging two schools into one building, and implementing new procedures.

Please remember we have our students' and community's best interest in mind, and are working together to provide the best experience possible!

Please welcome the following new staff at Birch Street Elementary: Jackie Send kindergarten teacher; Deborah Meyer ECSE paraprofessional; Jonni Malone, kitchen staff; Chealsy Woodhams, kitchen staff.



Chelsea Woodhams



Deborah Meyer



Jackie Send



Jonni Malone



The entrance to Kalkaska Upper Elementary School (Grades 3-5) is located at the west side of the building. The entrance to Birch Street Elementary School (Grades pK-2) is STILL at the east side of the building.

EVENTS

- ★ September 22 — ½-day students; dismissal is at 11:25 a.m.
- ★ October 19 — ½-day students
- ★ October 19 — Parent Teacher Conferences, 12:15-8 p.m.
- ★ October 20 — ½ day for everyone; dismissal is at 11:25 a.m.



The student photos show BSE students enjoying the brand new gymnasium as well as students just having fun being back in school every day! Welcome back!!!



◀ Nickey Torrey will be joining the KMS team as the new administrative assistant, filling the position left vacant when Linda Colvin moved to the athletic secretary position at KHS.



◀ A big Blazer welcome to our new KMS teachers! From left to right: Mrs. Ward – band, Mrs. Kovalcsik – 7th grade English, Ms. Phillips – physical education, Mrs. Haver – 8th grade English, Mrs. Taylor – 6th grade learning specialist. We are excited to have them on the team! Left: Mrs. Crawford's class completed some hands on math challenges during the first days of school.

District Readies New Strategic Plan

In early August, the Board of Education (BOE), several district employees, students, and community members met for two nights in the central office and worked on a new strategic plan for Kalkaska Public Schools.

The goal of the process was to determine a vision, mission, and core values for KPS as well as to develop themes to build new goals around. At the September 18 Board Meeting, the materials that were developed will be shared with the BOE for approval.

The proposals include the following:

- ★ Vision: Inspiring excellence through perseverance, resilience, and individual success;
- ★ Mission: Supporting families to build successful students;
- ★ Values: Pride—in community, school, and self; Learning—purpose is to create pathways to success for all students; Attitude—self-discipline, integrity, curiosity, compassion, courage, respect, responsibility, honor; Collaboration and Culture—every person feels safe, valued, and encouraged; Excellence—every day we improve.

The planning committee also identified eight theme areas to develop the goals around, including standardizing processes, assessing campuses, evaluating communication processes, assessing working conditions, creating additional meal options and improved nutrition, designing and implementing opportunities to expose younger students to career pathways, identifying ways to connect with all kids, and exploring systems to facilitate relationship building with our students.

School adds 200 students, changes dismissal process

As the new school year has quickly progressed, we have had several questions about why we changed the parent drop-off and pick-up policy at the Kalkaska Elementary School complex. We knew that adding nearly 200 students to the complex was going to complicate things.

We worked with Integrated Designs, Inc. — our engineer and architecture firm — to determine what might work with the new situation. IDI actually performed a transportation study at the site on two different occasions, watching both drop off and pick up. The firm developed a couple of recommendations, including some additional site work to create a new circle drive in front of Birch Street Elementary. (This is something that we may consider down the road, but is cost prohibitive at this point).

We decided to see if we could “create” better transportation options going into the Birch Street school, so we closed off one of the entrances. This requires everyone to come in one specific entrance.

Overall, our goal is to create a process that is both efficient and safe for everyone. We worked with Kalkaska Area Transit and our own bus department to determine a plan for busing. We want the process to work for everyone.

We shifted to the car line due to the increased number of students and the subsequent limited parking.

We continue to work with IDI to determine what will work now and in the future.

The local authorities do not want families parking along the street because of the potential of back ups.

Please continue to be patient and kind to staff as we work to determine the best dismissal strategy.

Dismissal will continue to be at 3 p.m. for the high school, 3:05 p.m. for the elementary schools, and 3:10 p.m. for the middle school. Thank you for your understanding!

Athletes sprint into the fall ...

FALL SPORTS IN FULL SWING

The calendar said August, but the fall sports season began for our high school Blazers on the 7th, and competitions started the following week. Middle school athletes began reporting a week after that. It has been exciting to see our kids back on the course, in the gym, and on the field, for the 2023-24 season!

FAMILIAR FACES IN NEW PLACES

We are pleased to announce the hiring of LINDA COLVIN as Athletic Secretary. She brings tremendous integrity and professionalism along with over two decades outstanding experience as an administrative assistant at the middle school. In addition, the Athletic Department has hired KHS alum TAYLOR CHAULK (Class of 2016) as Certified Athletic Trainer, in partnership with Munson Kalkaska Memorial Health Center. Also, joining the coaching ranks this season are STACIA DAVIS (JV Volleyball), NATALEE HAVER (Freshman Volleyball), and PAUL CARTMELL (7th/8th grade Football). Welcome aboard everyone!

NEW YEAR, NEW DIRECTION

The opening of our newly completed Kalkaska Elementary School has brought a change to the traffic pattern on campus. Please observe and obey the new signs and pavement markings that have switched our main campus access road from a two-way to a one-way street. Spread the word! We know that old habits take time to change, so for the sake of pedestrian safety, be aware. Especially after dark on event nights.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

The varsity cross country team took first place in the Dwayne Rau Memorial Invitational Meet at Ogemaw Heights in the girls race for our division. The boys were on the podium in third place. Nicely done! Senior MARIA ELENA VAZQUEZ medaled in the first varsity girls golf match of the season at The Quest Golf Course in Houghton Lake. Congrats to her! The JV and varsity football teams earned their first victories of the season, each defeating the Morley-Stanwood Mohawks in week 2. Keep it up guys! The varsity boys soccer team is off to an exciting start, posting wins over Kingsley, Reed City, and Benzie Central in their first two weeks of action. Way to go Blazers!

HELP WANTED

The Sports Boosters is looking to increase membership and participation. They will have an organizational meeting at the concession stand prior to the next home football game on September 7.

The Athletic Department is looking for additional help at our home sports events. Ticket sales, scoreboard operations, and official bookkeepers are needed. Please email Athletic Director Bryan Hawkins (athletics@kpschools.com) if you are interested.



The HS staff took their annual staff picture in the shirts provided by the district. These t-shirts are favorites for all staff to wear for home sporting events throughout the year.

Student Council planned an event for the school to "Say Goodbye to Summer" on August 31. Everyone was invited to dress up in their best summer gear and the Advisory with the most participation earned popcicles as their prize. Mrs. Little, Ms. Wilson and Mrs. Matley's Advisories were the big winners.

Kalkaska Upper Elementary's First Day(s)

The Kalkaska Upper Elementary had its first days of school...ever! Students and staff were very excited to check out the new classrooms. Staff worked very hard to make the classes warm and inviting for the students.

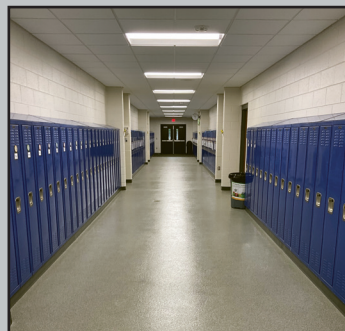
The Upper Elementary staff are continuing to work on making dismissal more efficient, allowing parents to pick up their children and exit the parking lot in a timely manner. We greatly appreciate the patience that parents and guardians have had with this process.

We will continue to utilize Facebook for announcements and small updates as the year moves on. We will also be using School Messenger for phone and email communications. Please make sure you have your correct email and phone number registered with your student.

The Upper Elementary would like to give a huge "Thank You" to our custodial staff that have worked hard to help up us get the building ready for students on their first day.



Above and below: Scenes from KUE on the first days of school. Left: Principal Ryan Moore spent some time in the Blazer Bash Dunk Tank! Ms. Jennelle Patton is the new third grade teacher. Ms. Amanda Niemic is the third grade student teacher, who is placed with Mr. Jeremy Gustafson.



Annual Blazer Bash a HUGE success for KPS

The KPS annual event, BLAZER BASH, continues to grow every year. In addition to a great and fun "welcome back" event for students and parents, the "Bash" also functions as an opportunity to involve our local community and partners to showcase their services and products.

Furthermore, the event included a silent auction, the famous dunk tank, and several bounce houses. Comments like this were frequent: "I've never seen this many people at Blazer Bash."

The band played "The Star Spangled Banner" to kick things off, and the crowd assembled really enjoyed the rendition.

Heather Reust is in her second year as the planner for the Bash and plans to continue to grow the event.

"We want to get a little bit better every year," she said.



WELCOME BACK BLAZERS!



WHAT'S NEW AT THE LIBRARY?



New tables and chairs, and new shelving for Birch Street and the Upper Elementary library this fall, thank you very much! (You'll still see the same smiling faces, though-- Ms. Jen, Ms. Lena, plus Ms. Marta!)

The library isn't just books. Students have access to Playaway audiobooks, thousands of digital books, and inter-library loans. Not to mention a knowledgeable and friendly staff ready to help students succeed!

CHECK US OUT!

All KPS students automatically have public library cards, too, and students can return KPS materials at the public library. Questions? Just call or email: info@kalkaskalibrary.org (231) 258-9411



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OPEN DURING UN-FORSEEN SCHOOL CLOSURES, BREAKS, AND ALL SUMMER!

CALL US NOW

- 231-258-7791 Kalkaska
- 231-369-2000 Forest Area
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ABOUT US

Teen Health Corner takes pride in providing compassionate and comprehensive care to youth in a teen friendly setting for 10-21 year olds at the Kalkaska Clinic and 5-21 year olds at the Forest Area clinic. We also provide Behavioral Health services for 5-21 year olds at the Kalkaska Middle School clinic.



Supporting families to build successful students.

KPS seeks school bus drivers

KPS is looking for parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. who would like to drive children to school and home safely.

AND GET PAID TO DO IT!

If you are interested, please contact the Kalkaska Public School Bus Garage at (231) 564-1518 and ask for Jim Vandefifer. We will help you get your license to be able to drive a school bus!

KALKASKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS WOULD LIKE TO THANK FOREST AREA CREDIT UNION FOR ALL OF ITS SUPPORT AND ALL OF THE BACK TO SCHOOL SUPPLY DONATIONS. THANK YOU!



New faces & changing places

The Greek Philosopher Heraclitus is credited with saying, “The only constant in life is change.” This statement rings true when you look at the new faces who have joined the KHS staff this year along with some familiar faces who relocated to the high school.

KIRK MCKAY

The newest addition to the math department is Kirk McKay, who was hired to replace Dan Wilson, who retired last year. McKay brings nine years of experience to KHS, but he admits that this is much different from the Ojibwa Charter School he came from in the Upper Peninsula, which only has 120 students K-12. He is settling into his new room and said he and his Pre-Algebra and Algebra I students have had a great first week.

“The majority of students have been very respectful and welcoming,” McKay said.

In his free time, McKay loves to play golf in the summer and is an avid sports fan in general. He also enjoys camping with his family.

SAMANTHA WARD

Our new band director, Samantha Ward, also migrated from a northern school district, Onaway, to join the faculty at KHS and KMS. The Michigan State grad taught for six years before joining our staff, the last four of which she served as Onaway’s band director. She said she is glad she made the move to a bigger program that she can help continue to grow. Starting the school year for any band director is tough because of the prep work necessary to get the students ready for marching season, but she feels supported by the staff, parents, and administration here.

“It’s a welcoming place,” Ward said. “Everyone has been very nice.”

JEREMY WILKINSON

Even though Jeremy Wilkinson has taught at the middle school since 2009, he still was apprehensive about moving up to the high school this year.

“At first, I was nervous,” he said. “I have had the same routine for so many years, I wasn’t sure what to expect or how it would go.”

The current freshmen may have also been surprised to learn that Wilkinson followed them up to the high school and will teach their Physical Education class this year, along with his Weights & Conditioning and Athletes in Action classes. Overall, he said everything is going well and his nerves were just a normal part of working through a big change.

“The kids have responded well, especially in my weights classes,” he said.

Wilkinson continues as the Varsity Football Coach, so the change in teaching assignment has also been a positive as he is now in the building with his players, so if they have questions or he has to inform them of changes, it is easier to do.

LINDA COLVIN

Another KPS veteran has changed buildings to share her talents with the high school staff and students. Linda Colvin is the new Athletic Secretary for both the high school and middle school. Over her 20 years of service to the district, she has worn many hats. First, she was a paraprofessional at Birch Street Elementary, and then served in the same role at the middle school. Eleven years ago, she shifted again to become the middle school secretary.

Although she has enjoyed all of her positions with the district, she said her main motivation to make the change to athletic secretary was to challenge herself to try something new. She added that the fall sports seasons and learning all of the things necessary for her new position has definitely challenged her, but she is glad she made the move.

“I have had an outpouring of support from staff, students, parents, community members, and, of course, my children, which has been extremely appreciated,” she said.

KHS is fortunate to have these great people join our staff. Please don’t hesitate to congratulate them and wish them well if you see them out and about at school or community events.



Upper Left, then clockwise: Mr. Wilkinson, Mr. McKay, Ms. Ward, and Mrs. Colvin.

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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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