



SPARTA AREA SCHOOLS

February 2023

BELL RINGER

Home of the Michigan Blue Ribbon Exemplary School

www.spartaschools.org

Strategic Progress - The Work of a School Community

The process of strategic planning is a community event - whether it is the organization's community in industry or the school community in schools. The stakeholders set the focus for the outcomes associated with a strategic plan. Sparta Area Schools embarked on this process in 2019 under the leadership of the Board of Education. The stakeholders represented many facets of our community - staff, students, members of the Board of Education, local business leaders, parents, and community members. We feel the work provided us with a very strong vision for how to move our district forward. The most important element, in my opinion, is the collective commitment associated with this level of work. In fact, the last line of the section describing what a strategic plan is states, "We can do this together." Together is a powerful word. It empowers us all. It inspires us to contribute. It invokes a shared commitment and ownership. As I shared in my last article in the Bell Ringer, Helen Keller is quoted as saying, "Alone, we can do so little; together we can do so much."

Although we were disrupted and delayed as we were asked to shift our focus to

navigating a pandemic, we made strides to honor the work of our community and to move our district forward. We have achieved successes in every goal area. The educational community as well as the greater Sparta Area Schools community have all contributed. TOGETHER we are achieving great things. We continue the work and have more successes to create. That work is ongoing and fruitful. As important as it is to keep our eyes looking toward the windshield of progress, it is essential to stop and look back at times. Below, I share some achievements we have made since our plan was adopted.

- To address the growing strain on a reduced candidate pool in education, we have developed and implemented a robust and highly supportive induction and mentoring program for all new teacher to Sparta Area Schools. This work will make Sparta an even more attractive environment in which to work so we can bring the best educators to our children.

- Diversity in curricular and co-curricular activities was a focus. In response, the district has added STEM specific courses from kindergarten

through high school. The secondary added a choral music program. We have added an Esports program. Men's volleyball became a club team. We have been working on developing a Future Farmers of America program. And the list could go on. We strive to make learning at high levels in many forms available to our students.

- We have added mental health support in every building while also fostering and growing outside agency relationships to provide a complete mental health support portfolio. This work includes seeking educational opportunities that provide common language and skills for all learners as they navigate their strong emotions and learn to be self-managing citizens.

- As a result of the extreme generosity of the community, we have completed the construction of a brand new middle school, we have renovated our previous middle school into a beautiful learning environment where our preschool learners can excel in an age friendly school. Each of the buildings received safety investments to make the learning environment an even safer experience for our students and staff.

The Board of Education continues to make school safety a priority. We recently hired a safety consultant to come into all of our school buildings to review our safety protocols and systems. We received a glowing report of enhanced safety. There were suggestions offered that the Board of Education evaluated and is presently working through implementation. This is an area we will never rest.

There are many other successes that we have experienced. This is a brief highlight. This work was completed from every layer of the organization, with support from our community, and has every staff member contributing. Without our great community, we would have completed so little. But, together, we have and will continue to achieve so much more. I look forward to updating you on the great work your school community will continue to provide to the students and families in our schools.

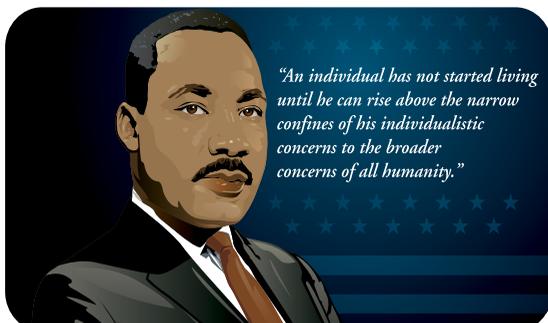
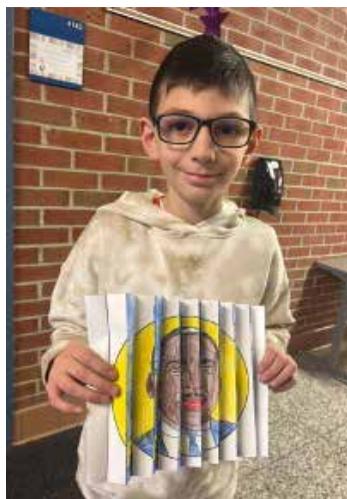
It is always a great day to be a Spartan!

Joel Stoner

Superintendent of Schools

Fourth grade students learn about Martin Luther King Jr.

On Monday January 16, the fourth graders took some time to learn about and discuss Martin Luther King Jr. Each classroom used a variety of resources including slideshows, books and videos to explore and research MLK's life and the impact he had. Students had a basic knowledge of his life from years past so this year we really focused on how we can apply what we learned from his life to ours. We also discussed why equality, fairness, and celebrating people's differences is so important. Our students have great insights and communicated some powerful ideas. "If he didn't help bring peace the world could still be like that [segregated] today" expressed Walter Gahagan. Students wrapped up the activities by creating a three dimensional poster showing Martin Luther King Jr. on one side and a sign of peace on the other. Hearing the students' thoughts and listening to their discussions on this important day was a great start to the week!



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Sparta High School Career Academy Student Spotlight

The Career Academy team has been able to provide an educational experience that meets students where they are at by providing flexibility, encouragement and career training. Students earn the right to gain placement at community businesses by keeping up on their online course work. While offering needed help at local businesses, students gain employability skills essential when they graduate.

Ben Briggs at Compass Credit Union says: During Montse's time at Compass Credit Union, she has filled the role of a Member Service Representative. In this role, Montse assists members of the Credit Union with processing transactions, answering any questions about their membership, and making recommendations to help fulfill their financial needs. One quality that I appreciate about Montse is her willingness to assist members. Montse is frequently the first person to greet our members as they walk through the door, and she



always has a positive attitude when assisting them.

Montserrat Mazariegos-Salaz explains "Before I started taking CAD, covid-19 was at its peak and I was falling behind in school and losing motivation. Once I started going to school again, taking CAD really helped me catch up and get back on track. Getting my work done and receiving my school credits eventually led me to a great opportunity. Mr. Smith

offered me an internship at Compass Credit Union. At first I wasn't sure about it but then I decided to give it a try. Being an intern at Compass has been great. Everyone was super welcoming and did not treat me any differently. I've learned a lot about financial situations and managing money. I thank everyone that helped make this happen."

Ben Mason explains that "CAD has helped me by giving me more time to study a subject before a test and not having to worry about missing any schoolwork for health related reasons. Working at Wensco has given me job skills, some gas money for school, and extra spending money."

Tayton Hull from Wensco says about Ben: "It has been great mentoring Ben and he always gets the jobs done that he is supposed to that day! He always has a smile on his face and enjoys being with everyone at the warehouse."



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Developmental Kindergarten and High School Artist Collaboration:

Our youngest artists and High School Artists drew their own masters with Mrs. Mitchell in the Ridgeview Art Studio. Then she sent the monster drawings to Mr. Crawford, at the High School, so his students could take the drawings and make their own versions of them. They are currently being displayed at Ridgeview. High School Artists also gifted their drawings to their DK counterparts! Thank you!



Upcoming Activities

Unified Basketball: Friday, February 24th (Time TBD)

We are excited to be hosting a Unified Basketball game during the month of February here at Sparta Middle School! Unified Basketball provides our students in Ms. Seigel's MoCI classroom an opportunity to participate in friendly competition against MoCI students from Zeeland Public Schools. Even better, this event is held during the school day so that our student body, parents and community members from each school can come out to support all the students competing!

If you would like to come and cheer on all the students competing and be witness to a truly inspiring event, please join us! We will be communicating times for this event in the very near future!

SMS 7th/8th Grade Student Dance: Friday, March 24th

All 7th and 8th grade students at Sparta Middle School are cordially invited to attend our upcoming dance on Friday, March 24th! We will have refreshments and snacks included with the price of admission. We look forward to a great time with our students and staff!

2023 SPARTA LITTLE LEAGUE SPRING SIGN-UPS

SIGN UP ONLINE AT: Spartalittleleague.org

Remember, if you go to Sparta Schools you can play Sparta Little League. It doesn't matter where you live.

ALL sign-ups are online. However, in-person help will be available at Sundaes in the Park in Sparta. Please see below for in-person sign-up times:

Saturday February 11th: 11am-2pm

Sunday, February 19th: 12pm-2pm

*Birth Certificate upload is required by Little League International

Registration is open through February 25th! There is a \$25.00 late fee for registrations after that date.

Please see below for cost of registration:

Baseball (Boys)/Softball (Girls)

T-Ball (Boys & Girls) 4-6 Year Olds	\$65.00 per player
Machine Pitch 7-8 Year Olds	\$70.00 per player
Minors 9-10 Year Olds	\$80.00 per player
Minors 11-12 Year Olds	\$80.00 per player
Majors 11-12 Year Olds	\$80.00 per player
Juniors 13-14 Year Olds	\$100.00 per player
Seniors 15-16 Year Olds	www.district9westmichiganll.com

What is the Best Part of Reading? Robin Hall - 3rd Grade

Pages turning, squeals of delight, nonstop chatter and deep engagement were just some of the highlights during our 3rd grade Nonfiction Book Frenzy. To kick off each new unit, our students are introduced to a new genre by immersing them in books. Our goal in a book frenzy is to motivate students to explore new texts in an adventurous way. We play games like Hot Potato, Musical Chairs or Scoot, except with books. Students are intrigued by exploring new books and can't wait to dive in and make their "MUST READ" lists. According to some pretty voracious readers in 3rd grade, the BEST part of reading is ... "having a book you are engaged in, having tons of books to choose from, and feeling like you're right in the story."



Wildflower Seed Balls and Wooden Fence at Applevue Nature Trails

What are the small balls on the small prairie and under the wooden fence at Applevue Nature Trails? The clay balls hold wildflower seeds that will grow into beautiful habitat and help save monarch butterflies. The lives of students and visitors will also be improved by connecting and learning about nature.

This has truly been a community project! We would like to thank everyone who made it happen: Church of the Nazarene high school youth group, Scott Walton, Sparta Parent Teacher Committee, Home Depot, Sparta School for the fence that separates the school and the neighbor's property; Family Farm and Home, Family Fare, Sparta Community Foundation, Sparta Senior Neighbors, and Middle School STEM classes for putting together 2,000 wildflower seed balls; and kindergarten classes and Sparta Education Foundation for getting them tossed onto the prairie.



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Happy New Year from your Sparta Education Foundation!

Many of us see the new year as a time to reflect, plan, and set goals. Others look to the new year as an impetus for change in their lives. Sparta Education Foundation is no exception.

Sparta Education Foundation was started in 1991 by a group of forward thinking community members with a vision to inspire learning and empower success. Since then, through the partnership with innovative teachers and generous community donors, SEF has been able to provide over half a million dollars in extras for education to Sparta students. But, as Abraham Maslow suggests, "In any given moment we have two options: to step forward into growth or step back into safety". SEF is looking at 2023 as an opportunity to grow.

The SEF board of directors has spent several months investigating the possibility of adding the position of executive director to our organization. After much research

and discussion, it was unanimously decided that adding this position was a logical next step. Our community is growing, and thankfully, so is our donor base. The new year seems the perfect time to add someone who can help manage the growth of SEF. The addition of an executive director will aid the foundation both by seeking new sources of funding as well as finding opportunities for SEF to connect with our community and give back to you who give so much to us.

This part-time, paid position will work closely with the community, schools, and the SEF board of directors to enhance our ability to meet our mission to provide creative, progressive, and innovative educational opportunities for Sparta Area Schools students pre-K through 12th grade which are beyond the normal operating budget of the school district. We are looking to hire someone to fill this position in the early weeks of 2023. If you or someone you know has

a passion for public education and the skills to help manage a nonprofit organization such as SEF, please go to our website www.spartaschools.org/sef for information on how to apply, or you can go directly to our posting on Indeed.com.

A second change coming to the SEF is that of a new treasurer. Our current treasurer, Ron Hoover, has announced his plan to retire in June 2023. He has done a fabulous job over his years of tenure, and we are sorry to see him go. True to Ron's nature and attitude of service, he has graciously offered to mentor his replacement beginning in April. This position is paid a small stipend to cover time spent managing the finances and completing tax requirements. If you have basic accounting experience and are looking for a way to serve your community, this might be a perfect fit! To find out more, please go to our webpage www.spartaschools.org/sef.

We are grateful for the many



community members both past and present who support the students of Sparta Area Schools by serving as volunteers with the SEF. They are indeed the backbone of this organization. Several members of the SEF board of directors will be completing their terms at the end of June. If you have an interest in supporting public education, and a passion for impacting the education of Sparta Area Schools students, then we would love to hear from you! Please go to our webpage,

www.spartaschools.org/sef and connect with us!

Change is rarely easy, but the Sparta Education Foundation is looking forward to the growth that these changes will bring to our organization. Ultimately, our growth will benefit the students of Sparta Area Schools, and that's what it's really all about.

May 2023 bring you growth as well.

LeAnn Kitson
President, Sparta Education Foundation



Writing in Kindergarten

Throughout the months of January and February the kindergarten classes use writing time to delve into informational writing. We focus on making sure we write FACTS and not our opinions! This is a time that we can practice research and writing about topics we know a lot about. A fun way that we use these colder months to spark some excitement about informational writing is with a week long arctic animal rotation schedule. The kindergarten teachers split into two groups and each teacher is responsible for helping students research and write about a different arctic animal. The kids have the opportunity to get writing instruction from 3 additional teachers, which always makes it even more interesting for the kids. The kids are able to learn about walruses, polar bears, snowy owls, and arctic foxes. Be sure to check in with your kindergartener so they can share all they have learned about arctic animals!



Sparta Early Childhood Center 2023-2024 Enrollment and Open House

- Tuition 3's Preschool
- Childcare
- Great Start Readiness Program-4's Preschool
- Head Start-3's only



March 14, 2022
4:30-6:30

4's Preschool- 4 years old by September 1, 2022

3's Preschool- 3 years old by December 1, 2022

Head Start- 3 years old by December 1, 2022

(Children who turn 4 between September 2nd and December 1st can enroll into the 3's Head Start Preschool or 3's tuition preschool or can apply for 4's preschool but will not be placed until September)

Please bring the following documentation

- State Issued Birth Certificate
- Proof of Residency
- Proof of Income-4's Preschool and Head Start
 - For anyone working in the home



Building a foundation and a love for learning along with kindergarten readiness are the primary focus of the preschool years. The foundation is built on play as the primary mode of learning as well as a consistent daily routine, meals, group times, outdoor time and peer interactions.

Throughout the year the children will be building their skills in the areas of math, literacy, social emotional, gross and fine motor, writing, and the sciences. The home-school connection is a critical piece of preschool ensuring that families feel accepted, comfortable, and part of their child's education at the early childhood center.

For questions or information: Call 887-0068 or email heather.lashuay@spartaschools.org.

Educationally,
Heather Lashuay
Director of Sparta Early Childhood Center





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HELP WANTED: Ridgeview is looking to hire Lunch/Recess Aides. The schedule is 10:40am - 1pm. If you have ANY availability Monday-Friday please reach out. Please call the Ridgeview Office 616-887-8218 or email Kelley.VanVliet@spartaschools.org. Please share this message with family and friends.



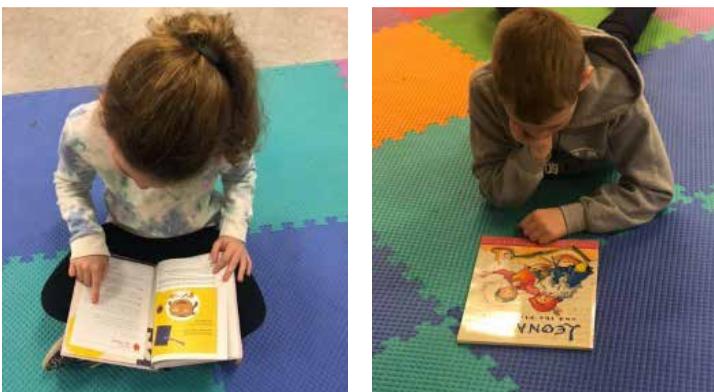
SEF Supports Elementary Art Program

Thanks to our awesome Sparta Education Foundation for fulfilling a grant request for books to support the art program at Applevue. These books are providing a great inspiration for my art lessons and will inspire creativity in students. When I am ready to introduce a new art concept, I enjoy selecting books that provide examples of how the artist used that concept to create meaning. I was able to select biographies on a variety of artists, books that support the Elements of Art and the Principles of Design, and books that explain the history of art. Books are just one more tool that I use to add to the enjoyment of art. The students have already begun to explore them.

- Sandy Davis; Applevue Art Teacher

The Sparta Education Foundation awarded the Ridgeview and Applevue Art Programs grants to fund purchasing Art themed books to build the Art Studio Libraries in each building. Pictured here are some of our Ridgeview artists, taking a book break, after completing their artistic masterpieces. The students at Ridgeview also got a new bookshelf, in their Art Studio, that turns for easy access and fits perfectly in the space.

- Heidi Mitchell; Ridgeview Art Teacher



Let's Get Ready to Bumble!

Applevue Elementary held their annual spelling bee on Friday, January 6th. Each classroom sent representatives to the school wide bee based on the results of their classroom bees that took place in December.

The bee started out on a wonderful note as all 43 spellers, who participated on that day, advanced to the second round! It was amazing to see all the participants handling themselves in such a positive manner as they went through the bee whether they advanced to the next round or not. It was also so encouraging to see each participant's classmates

cheering them on and supporting them from the audience. We were grateful that parents, grandparents and other supporters could enjoy the bee in person with us this year as well.

The bee came to an end when Caroline Wolford was crowned Applevue's spelling bee champion and Leah Partridge was named runner-up. These two

young ladies will represent Applevue Elementary in the next round of bee competition in February.

A special thanks goes out to Mrs. Lehner, Mrs. Barr, Mrs. Swanson, and Mrs. Utter who served as judges for this year's bee as well as each classroom teacher who ran their classroom spelling bees.

Applevue Spelling Bee Classroom Winners 2023

3rd Grade	Winner	Runner Up
Beuschel	Noah VanOveren	Emberlyn Woods
Finholm	Ethan Cell	Ryan Southwell-Blaauw
Fredrickson	McKenna Kimmer	Evie Boehms
Glynn	Natalie Schmuker	Keyla Ortega Ovieda
Hall	Joevanni Chapa	Oliver Tolar
Hurley	Aubrey DeWys	Braeden Short
Ignasiak	Kellan Car	Natalie Kober
Singleton	Weston Tomasunas	Wesley Kober
4th Grade		
Barr	Sawyer Wilcox	Alissandra Duran
Davis	Rayah Wert	Taylor DeBoer
Groll	Fisher Doutz	Sophia Jasperse
Kilpatrick	Will Hohendorf	Trevor Vanderhyde
Shelner	Maci LeLemore	Ava Mey
Taylor	Brice Peters	Logan Stulp
Zdanciewicz	Madison Murray	Beechum Swiger
5th Grade		
Albaitis	Gracie Halladay	Caroline Wolford
Cavner	Ada Combe	Alessandra Guerra
Frazier	Porter Calhoun	Troy Johnston
Ley	Autry Bockheim	Gabe Genther
Kuzniewski	Eden Steinhauer	Arianna Armstrong
Swihart	Julian Middleton	Benjamin DeWys
Utter	Emmalynn Ruffer	Zephan Smith