



SPARTA AREA SCHOOLS

February 2024

BELL RINGER

Home of the Michigan Blue Ribbon Exemplary School

www.spartaschools.org

Continual Improvement - The Sparta Way

Hello Spartans!

As we embark on the new year with many of us starting new commitments and resolutions, Sparta continues to progress forward in the pursuit of our goal of being better for our kids every day. In lieu of losing weight or kicking a bad habit, our district continues to work each day, year round, to get better. This may be revising programs, adding programs, and pursuing new initiatives in alignment with our strategic plan. It might be our continuous school improvement process that we revisit every month as an administrative team where we dialogue and collect information from our buildings around the academic and behavioral metrics we use to improve our adult behaviors. It might be our efforts creating and working on the new academic and athletic conference, River Cities Alliance. Our staff is very proud of their efforts in providing a better experience for our learners every day.

Our work on the strategic plan revisions that began in the fall

continues. We have completed focus groups and are mostly through the collection of survey data. The product this summer will be a new three year plan. We have received hundreds of individual responses on the survey. We are very proud of and thankful for the involvement this community has shown in our progress at improving our product in our schools. We anticipate this involvement will have a significant influence on the focus areas and goals that we as a district hone in on over the next three school years.

In alignment with our strategic planning process, our school improvement goals embrace a model of continuous reflection and refinement so that we maintain a culture of growth mindset required to provide an educational environment conducive to all learners. This mindset of continuous improvement embodies what Sparta, as a district and community, aspires to be. Our goals and focus areas are driven by the needs of our learners. The needs are supported by data and are addressed through professional

dialogue at the classroom, grade/department and building level. We visit our efforts and our progress each month and react to the data in real time to move our students and district forward. The ongoing cycle of improvement has and will continue to direct our efforts.

Through the strategic planning and school improvement process, we learn that some things we are doing we need to keep doing, some things need to stop and some things need to evolve. An example of something that has and will continue to evolve is our partnership in the development of a new academic and athletic conference, River Cities Alliance. Something Sparta has always prided itself on is its ability to foster great relationships. That ability to develop and keep relationships was a driving force in our efforts to reimagine the partnerships, academically and athletically, we were experiencing in the OK Conference.

Additionally, we understand that students seeking to be involved in extracurricular activities need and want opportunities to participate/

compete. The River Cities Alliance, with its districts with close proximity and the ability of all schools to field multiple levels of teams and support academic related activities, will provide more of what our students need. We are excited to continue this work and look forward to the amazing experiences it will provide our students later this year when we begin the new conference.

The new year always allows for fresh starts and new beginnings. Spring will bring that same sense to us very soon. As your local public school, we are in continual bloom as we seek new and creative ways to bring the best possible experience to our learners. We are thankful for your support and assistance. We look forward to more efforts and progress as we continue to provide this community an amazing educational experience that produces great citizens, the Sparta Way!

Every Day is a Great Day to be a Spartan!

Joel

Mrs. DeKoster's Christmas Challenge

Every year for the past 10+ years, Mrs. DeKoster, School social worker, does a Christmas Challenge with 3rd graders. She has a list of 30 activities that students can do during the Christmas break if they choose. If they do 12- less than half, return the sheet, then they get a prize. These activities include things like reading, helping an adult with a meal, making a tent/fort, drawing, learning a new skill, knitting or crocheting, looking at old pictures, playing a board game, writing a thank you note- you get the idea. The purpose of the challenge is to get students doing some activities other than electronics that foster relationships. When children feel more connected they are less worried and upset. It helps build a feeling of security. In addition, students have fun and can learn skills that help them such as problem solving, persistence, following directions/rules, turn taking, etc. This year about 75 3rd graders participated and brought back their sheets. Many of them did more than the required 12 for a prize and 7 of those 75 did all 30! The students report they had fun and have learned new skills like doing a backbend, yo-yo, and running a splitter. More importantly, these activities create memories for kids that are, in my opinion, the best gifts they can get!



Big Hearts Fill Blessing Bags

Third graders at Appleview showed just how big their hearts are when they participated in a service project called Blessing Bags. Student families and teachers collected an incredible amount of donations including socks, gloves, snacks, toothbrushes, and other hygiene items to create each Blessing Bag. With the holidays, teachers wanted students to experience the joy of giving to those less fortunate in the community and the greater Grand Rapids area. After the students assembled each bag, they personally delivered them to Mel Trotter here in Sparta! Over 350 Blessing Bags were assembled! From there, they were distributed to the homeless and needy in our area. Some students even took a Blessing Bag to keep in the car to share with someone in need that they encountered during the holiday season. This important project not only warmed the hands of those in need, but the hearts of each and every third grader!





ECC Students Create Classroom Coral Reef

Our four-year-old preschool classrooms spent 6 weeks working on creating a classroom coral reef. The students use recyclable materials to craft all the parts of a coral reef. At the end of the unit, they invite their families in to come do a scavenger hunt and learn about coral reefs.



ECC Celebrates Holiday Spirit Week

Our students showed their holiday spirit during spirit week at the ECC! We had holiday accessories day, PJ day, holiday colors day, and Ugly



 A close-up photo of a brown and white dog's face, looking directly at the camera. The dog has a blue collar with a yellow tag.

“ SURE, AT FIRST I WAS A LITTLE TAKEN ABACK BY THE WHOLE PEEING STANDING UP THING. BUT I TAUGHT HIM TO THROW A STICK AND NOW HANGING OUT WITH HIM IS THE BEST PART OF MY DAY. ”

— EINSTEIN
adopted 12-09-10

adopt
the shelterpetproject.org

Ad Council THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

It Really Does Take A Village

Have you ever wondered if your financial gift to the Sparta Education Foundation (SEF) makes a difference beyond the students of Sparta Area Schools? It does!

The SEF's mission is to help provide creative and innovative educational opportunities for Sparta students which are beyond the normal operating budget of the school district. We are only able to do this through generous donations from businesses and members of our community. But how much do those gifts really matter?

Sparta has a vibrant downtown with programs and festivals and traditions. We have great restaurants, shopping, and a forward-thinking local government. We have community theater, concerts, a busy dance studio, and a fantastic library. We have locally owned businesses that provide everything from snow tires to birthday cakes to professional photography. And, of course, we have our apple and agricul-

tural industry.

What do all these businesses have in common? Sparta graduates. Everywhere I look I see former Sparta students who are shaping the world, boosting our economy, and building our identity as a Great Place to Grow.

More than a dozen current teachers for Sparta Area Schools are returning graduates of Sparta High School. These teachers, along with their colleagues and support staff, are influencing the future of Sparta every day. When SEF partners with teachers, we impact our current students, but there is more to it than that. We live in a global society. Does Sparta have any influence outside of our little corner of Michigan? The answer is a resounding yes!

Sparta grads are leaving their mark on the world, taking the lessons and values they learned here in their hometown and making the

world a better place for all of us. The Shedd Aquarium, Cleveland Clinic, Disney, Trevor Project, and NBC all employ former Sparta students. Our graduates are giving TED talks, serving in the military and national government, training NBA players, broadcasting on national television, working on conservation and climate solutions, creating art, entertaining others, and saving lives.

So what does all of this have to do with SEF? Grants. I may not be able to draw a direct link between a specific grant and a former student, but I believe there is a connection to be made. Grants have provided for the public display of artwork and transportation for field trips, partnered with the DNR, purchased native plants, broadcast and photography equipment, musical instruments and theatrical devices, sports and health equipment, and enabled mental health support with assemblies and support animals like Toast.



I don't remember the first time I heard the phrase. "It takes a village to raise a child," but I believe it is true. And when those children are grown, they influence the village by giving back. Every single position and business mentioned in this article is connected to a real life, Sparta grad. It could be you or someone you know.

Making a financial gift to SEF truly IS an investment in the future of our students and our community. And right now is the perfect time to give. Your donation will

be matched, dollar for dollar, by a generous local supporter. With your help, we will continue to provide classroom grants to Sparta Area Schools for decades to come. I truly believe that when we invest in our students today, they will enrich us all tomorrow. I hope you will join me. <https://sparta-education-foundation.givecloud.co/>

LeAnn Kitson
President
Sparta Education Foundation



 **Head Start for Kent County**
Connecting Families and Community Resources



Local, High-Quality Early Childhood Program!

Preschool Classrooms for 3 year olds!

Children must be 3 years of age by December 1. Children who turn four between Sept. 2 and Dec. 1 are encouraged to apply for our 3 year old preschool services.

Services Offered

Transportation Options Available

Family Support

Diapering Supplies

Nutritious Meals, Snacks and Formula

Health and Developmental Screenings



Apply Now!

<https://hs4kc.org/apply/>

Contact Us!

616-453-4145



BELL RINGER

Important Dates for SMS Parents/Guardians:

- Mid-Winter Break: Monday, February 19th & Tuesday, February 20th
- SMS Parent-Teacher Conferences: Thursday, March 21st
 - 3:30pm-6:30pm
- End-of-Marking Period 3 Progress Reports: Wednesday, March 27th
- Spring Break: Thursday, March 28th-Friday, April 5th
 - School Resumes on Monday, April 8th



SMS Spring Dance

- Thursday, March 14th: 6:00pm-8:00pm

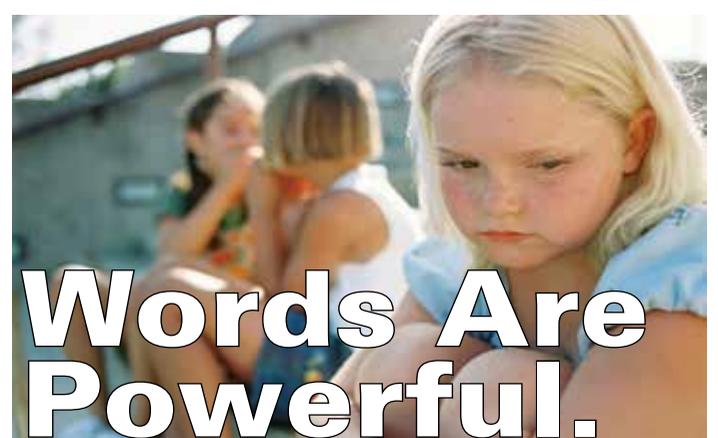
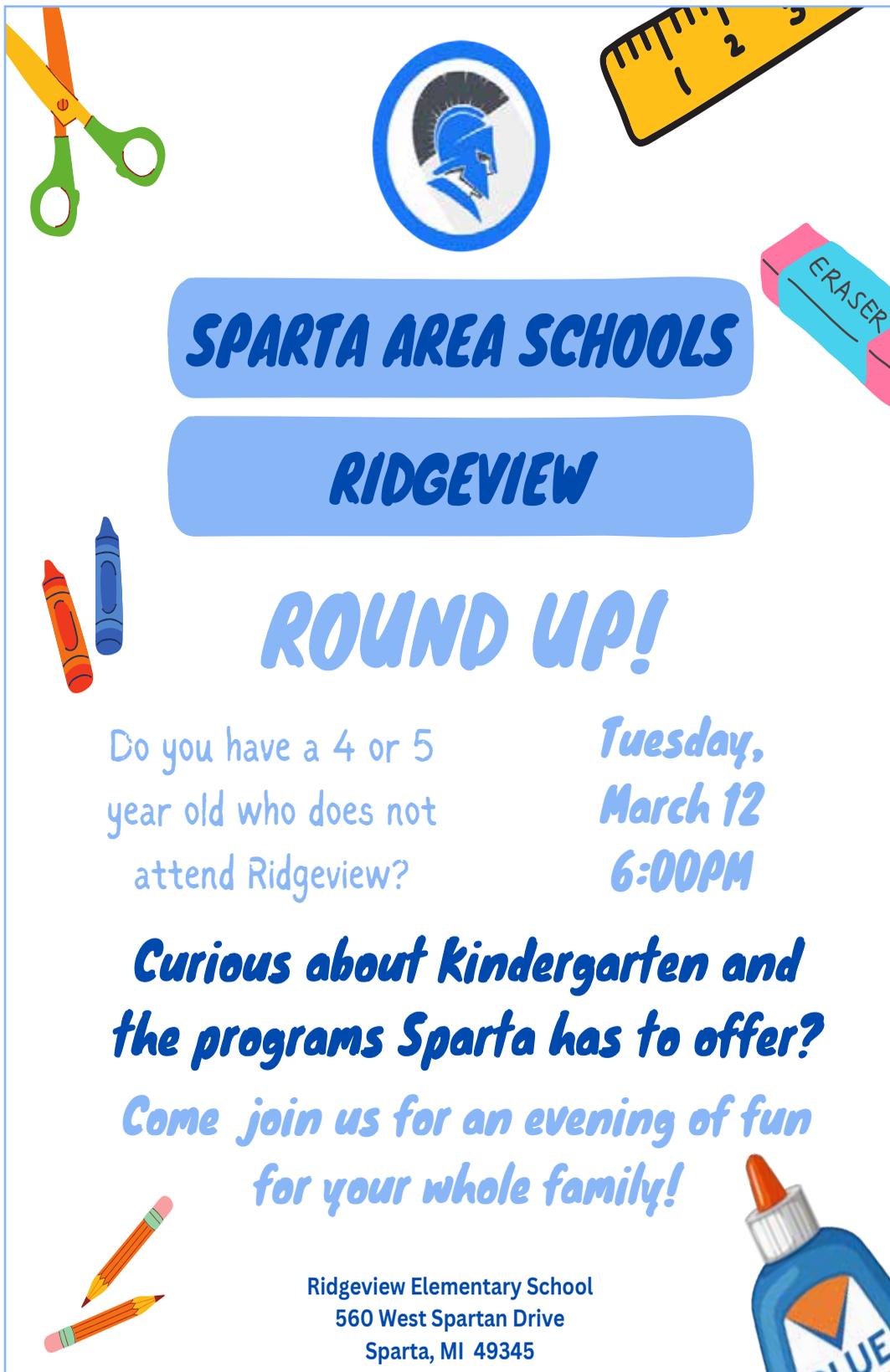
SMS Spring Testing Calendar (PSAT & M-Step)

- PSAT Testing for 8th Graders:
 - Tuesday, April 16th Testing is in an online format this year.
- M-STEP Testing: (See Table Below)

Subject Tested	Grades Tested	Testing Dates
ELA	6th & 7th	Monday, April 22nd-Wednesday, April 24th
Social Studies	8th	Monday, April 22nd-Wednesday, April 24th
Math	6th, 7th & 8th	Monday, April 29th-Wednesday, May 1st

Thank you PTC!

A special "Thank you" to our wonderful PTC for giving the teachers some extra money for inside recess games. Mrs. Lambert's class is enjoying all the fun new board games, card games and the tossing tic tac toe game.

SPARTA AREA SCHOOLS

RIDGEVIEW

ROUND UP!

Do you have a 4 or 5 year old who does not attend Ridgeview?

Tuesday, March 12 6:00PM

Curious about Kindergarten and the programs Sparta has to offer?

Come join us for an evening of fun for your whole family!

Ridgeview Elementary School
560 West Spartan Drive
Sparta, MI 49345

Words Are Powerful.

Use Yours to Help Stop Bullying.

Bullying can make kids feel isolated, sad and hopeless, but a kind word or gesture from a classmate can make a world of difference. Help fight bullying by setting an example of kindness and caring with your words and actions at home, and encouraging your child to do the same at school.