



SPARTA AREA SCHOOLS

May 2023

# BELL RINGER

Home of the Michigan Blue Ribbon Exemplary School

[www.spartaschools.org](http://www.spartaschools.org)

## Sparta - The Right Place for You

Very soon, our year will culminate with our high school graduation. We will once again send out a couple hundred Spartans ready to impact the world. As much as we look forward to their many contributions, it always surprises me how quickly a school year passes by. From the first sporting event before school even begins until the last child walks out to the bus in June, it feels like a blink. Yet, so much good fills the space between those two things. Children learn to read. Multiplication facts are mastered. Middle school students grow five inches! Academic and athletic success is experienced. Seniors graduate. College acceptance letters are received. Preparation for basic training begins. We are so grateful to enjoy these moments with

you and our school community. We could not achieve as we have without our amazing partnerships with the families that choose Sparta as

their school district. Everyday I am inspired by our students and what they achieve. I am humbled by the love and effort our staff puts into their students and their craft. I am appreciative of the trust our parents have shown to allow us to educate their children. With that gift, I remain focused on improving on the great things we accomplish together. To learn and understand where we are as a school system, parents, students and staff will be receiving a survey so we can identify what is important to these stakeholders. We

will continue to strive to provide the very best we can to meet the needs of our students, our families, and our community. We value and respect your input. Your feedback makes us better. As we reflect on the feedback and this past school year's great accomplishments, we look to the next school year and begin our work to provide an even better outcome. Our goal and aspiration is to be THE destination for ALL students that reside in Sparta Area Schools. All families that reside in our district deserve to experience the partnership we enjoy with our families in our schools today. Sometimes it is hard to parade what it is that makes you special. Our staff is humble, and that is part of what makes them fantastic. But, we want to ensure that all in our

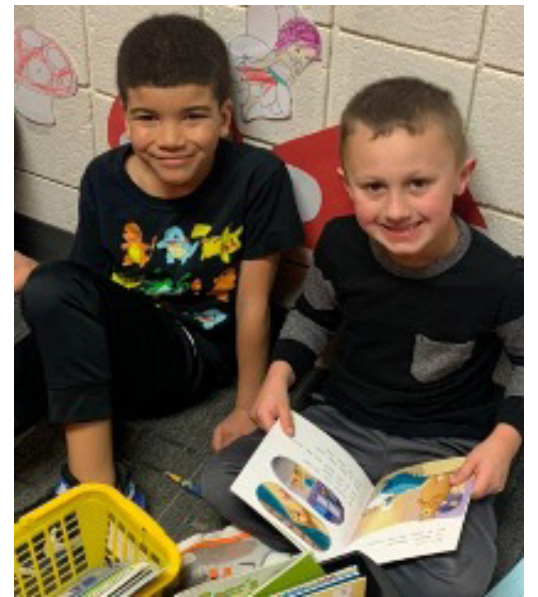
community are aware of the amazing school community that is right here for their children. If you live in our district and have school aged children, but for whatever reason have chosen another option for your children, you may receive some mailings that will share our story and showcase what we believe makes us special. We invite you to learn more and to engage us in a conversation. We are here for you. We are here for your children. If you have a need, in Sparta, WE Will!

It is always a great day to be a Spartan!

**Joel Stoner**  
Superintendent of Schools

## Career Academy Spotlight on Success Star Alcocer-Rodriguez

Star Alcocer-Rodriguez is a fun and driven kid. She makes us laugh everyday in the Career Academy. She has worked her butt off over the past couple years, and she only has a few more classes to finish before graduation. Her work in the criminal justice program at KCTC Star has earned her CPR, AED, dispatch, and mental health certifications. She was also recognized for a leadership award by her KCTC instructors. She is currently interviewing for an intern position at the Kent County Sheriff's Department. She said, "If I like it, then I'll go into the cadet program or I'll go into the GRPD program." She is hoping her stand-out performance throughout the internship will earn her sponsorship in those programs. Officer Costa suggested that she attend the Metro Police Academy for a summer program, which she is planning on doing. In her future, Star plans on becoming a corrections officer, a position that will benefit greatly from strong, caring individuals such as Star. We (your Career Academy teachers) wish you all the best, Star, and we have no doubt that you will be a great asset in your chosen field.



## Reading Month Celebration

As part of the March Reading Month celebration, our first graders read in the hallway with a friend from a different classroom for 15 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the month. To make it a bit more fun, each student is given a finger flashlight to use as well. Our building theme is fairy tales and the first grade theme is reading in the Enchanted Forest. We have a lot of incentives for the first graders to increase their reading time both at school and at home for the month, and hopefully, this will encourage more reading time for the future. Keep up the good work Ridgeview readers!!!

## Art and music collaboration at Applevue



Thanks to the Sparta Education Foundation our Ridgeview and Applevue students enjoyed Art & Music Collaboration with John & Paula Kasica and our art and music teachers! John & Paula spent 40 years playing in the Saint Louis Symphonic Orchestra, they are master musicians and our students had an amazing experience listening to their music and learning about their instruments. All while learning about and creating their own masterpieces inspired by the Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky had a rare condition that when he heard music he saw color and when he saw color he heard music. At age 30 he began to create his "musical" paintings. He once said, "I want you to come and listen to my paintings."





## BELL RINGER

# The Lion Heart Experience

Thanks to the Sparta Education Foundation, Applevue got to enjoy the Lion Heart Experience. The group's message was that each of us is a masterpiece, we all have worth and the world would not be the same without each of us. This message was brought to life through singing, painting, and the carefully sculpted words of the four-man crew. The canvas created during the experience now hangs in the lobby of Applevue to serve as a reminder that everyone is important.



## 8th Grade Recognition Ceremony: A Sparta Middle School Tradition Continues!

Our 2023 8th Grade Recognition will be Wednesday, May 24th, at 6:30pm. At this time, we are planning on hosting the event at Spartan Stadium. However, based on the forecast for that week, we do have the option to move indoors to the gym/field-house at the high school. We are also planning to have a dance afterwards in the high school cafeteria for our 8th graders who attended Recognition. There is NO LIMIT to the number of guests/family members that may attend to support each of our 8th grade students at the Recognition ceremony.



## Congratulations to our 7th & 8th grade SMS Bands for earning SUPERIOR ratings at their Band Festival in Coopersville!

Our 7th Grade Band, 8th Grade Band, HS Concert Band, and HS Wind Ensemble attended band festival. They performed for a panel of 3 judges who graded the bands based on the areas of tone, intonation, rhythm, technique, and interpretation. They also participated in the sight-reading portion of the festival, where our students were handed a piece of brand new music and were given five minutes to study the piece. At the end of the five minutes, they performed the piece for a rating. This tests our students' music literacy, or ability to apply their musical knowledge to a new piece of music in a very short period of time.

All four of our bands received First Division "Superior" ratings! Our students have shown a tremendous amount of growth in the past year, as we have worked to rebuild our program since COVID. Their resilience is admirable! We are so proud of all of our students and their hard work!

**Come out and support our SMS band students at their upcoming Spring Concerts!**

### 6th Grade Band

**May 16th: Spring Concert - 7:30 pm  
Sparta High School Auditorium**

### 7th & 8th Grade Bands

**May 16th: Spring Concert - 7 pm  
Sparta High School Auditorium**

### 8th Grade Band

**May 11th: Spring Concert - 7pm  
Sparta High School Auditorium**





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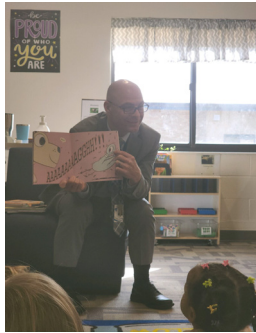
## Building Readers at the ECC!

Reading is everywhere at the early childhood center!

Building a love for books and print is at the core of learning at the early childhood center. During the month of March it is also reading month and the center does special activities. One of our favorite activities is having guest readers from our school buildings and community.



Mr. Birely reads to a group of 4 years in Mrs. Austin and Miss Kim's class.



Mr. Stoner reads to our 3 year olds in Miss Ashton, Miss Kali and Miss Hannah's class.



Mrs. VanVliet reads to a class of 4 year olds in Miss Sarah and Miss Barb's class.



Our center library is a place where children can enjoy books and check out a book to take home and share with their families.



## SEF Welcomes New Executive Director

It is with great pleasure and excitement that Sparta Education Foundation (SEF) introduces our very first executive director, Mr. Matthew Hayes. Matt comes to us highly recommended by references in both the business and private sectors. He is a proven leader, having worked in multiple executive-level positions helping organizations grow and adapt to changes in complex environments. Matt is passionate about education. He has a bachelor of science degree in science education, a master of science degree in environmental science, and strong family ties to education. Matt is also dedicated to communities. He has applied his training and expertise cleaning up contamination in the environment, educating people and companies about safety and environmental stewardship, and for nearly two decades, working for an Alaska Native corporation providing benefits to Alaska Native organizations and their peoples. Currently, he is a small business owner investing in real estate which allows him the flexibility to bring his passion, energy, and executive expertise to the SEF.



The addition of an executive director came about after more than a year of research and exploration by the SEF board of directors. During that time, the SEF worked directly with a consultant to evaluate our needs as an organization and research the economic feasibility of adding such a position. We also sought input from the Johnson Center of Philanthropy at GVSU as well as education foundations throughout Michigan to determine how an executive director might fit with our organization and enhance our ability to reach our mission of "Providing Extras for Education." The board voted unanimously to move ahead, and in January we began the search. After a lengthy application and interview process, the SEF board of directors voted unanimously to extend an offer to Mr. Hayes to become executive director.

The role of executive director is new to our board, and the decision to move in this direction did not come easily. Our research suggests that adding an executive director to an organization such as SEF results in increased giving. We understand that change like this takes time. The executive director will be working side by side with our committees and under the direction of the board of directors. Ultimately, our expectation is that the addition of this role will raise the visibility of SEF and enhance communications between SEF, the Sparta Area Schools, and our community. It will also aid us in developing and maintaining long-term relationships with our donors and identify new sources of funding thus allowing SEF to expand our grants and impact the learning of Sparta students for decades to come.

Matt has hit the ground running. His official first day was March 6. He has attended committee meetings, arranged tours of the schools for himself in order to get to know the staff and see Sparta Schools in action, and most recently, he and his wife, Tina, spent the day volunteering at RetroBowl where they were able to meet some of our families and teachers while participating in our biggest fundraiser of the year. They were a much appreciated presence at what turned out to be another successful event.

A huge thank you to all those involved in supporting this year's RetroBowl. We would especially like to thank the many businesses and families who supported us financially, with door prizes, and with their time.

Sparta Education Foundation is very excited about the prospects that this new partnership will bring to the Sparta community in general and to Sparta Area Schools specifically. We wholeheartedly believe that it is our students who will most greatly benefit from this alliance. Please join us in welcoming Mr. Matt Hayes to the Sparta Education Foundation and our community.

**LeAnn Kitson, President  
Sparta Education Foundation**

Friday  
**APRIL 28**

Scan for preschool locations



# PRESCHOOL HERE I COME

9 AM-  
2 PM

Will your child be 4 by December 1?  
Join us for an open house style event to learn more about GSRP preschool, visit classrooms, meet teachers, ask questions, and complete the preschool intake application.





These materials were developed under a grant awarded by the Michigan Department of Education.





# BELL RINGER

## Kindergarten Roundup

On March 14th Ridgeview kindergarten teachers, developmental kindergarten teachers, and other Sparta community members hosted our annual Ridgeview Round Up. However, this year the event looked quite a bit different than in the past. This event was designed as a way for new and returning families to take a look at all of the different programs that Sparta Area Schools and the community has to offer, with a focus on programs for 4 & 5 year olds. It was great to see so many families take advantage of this evening as an opportunity to learn about the programs. The families that came had the opportunity to chat with many different programs in the community, some examples include: Head Start, ECC, Sparta Library, and Youth Basketball. Families also had a chance to tour parts of the school. In the kindergarten hallway they had the opportunity to explore 2 different kindergarten rooms and 1 developmental kindergarten classroom. They also got to take a look in the library for some coloring, read aloud, and sing along. Families could also take advantage of our playground and could take advantage of some bonus fun. Some of the extras they got to enjoy were popcorn, popsicles, and face painting. It was a really fun way for Ridgeview Staff to showcase the many great opportunities families will have if they enroll their children in Sparta Area Schools for kindergarten or developmental kindergarten in the fall!

## Kindergarten Screening

If you have a child that will be attending Kindergarten or Developmental Kindergarten at Ridgeview Elementary in fall who did not participate in a preschool program at Sparta's Early Childhood Center, please be sure to sign up for kindergarten screening! This is a chance for the kindergarten team to meet your child and see what foundations skills they are coming in with, for the principals and secretaries to be available to answer any of your questions, and another opportunity to be at Ridgeview to help ease any school nerves. Screening will be the evening of Thursday, April 20. Please use this QR code to sign up!



**Understood**  
for learning & attention issues

For the 1 in 5 kids with learning and attention issues, every day can be a challenge. Explore Understood.org, a free online resource designed to help you help your child thrive in school and in life.

Brought to you by 15 nonprofit partners.

[understood.org](http://understood.org)

**Sparta Education Foundation**  
Providing Extras for Education

# Fundraising Event

## FOOD for THOUGHT

Tuesday, April 11, 2023  
12 pm - 9 pm

Stop in for lunch and/or dinner at

148 E. Division St.  
Sparta, MI  
(616) 887-2500

100% of donations placed in our contribution containers will be donated to the Sparta Education Foundation.

Your support will help us provide classroom grants that benefit Sparta Area Schools.

Find us on Facebook: Sparta Education Foundation MI  
[www.spartaschools.org/sef](http://www.spartaschools.org/sef)

**COUPON**

Please present this coupon upon ordering and **10% of your total bill** (dine-in or take-out) will be generously donated to the **SPARTA EDUCATION FOUNDATION** during our **FOOD for THOUGHT** fundraising event.

\*\*\* This coupon **MUST** be presented at time of order \*\*\*

**Thank You TRINI'S !**

**“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