

# 269

MAGAZINE

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**REWARD AND  
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HOW CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE  
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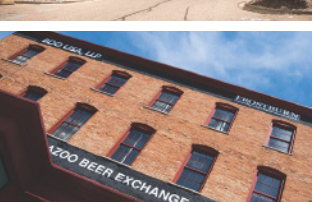
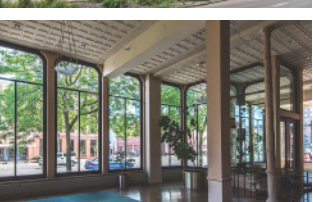
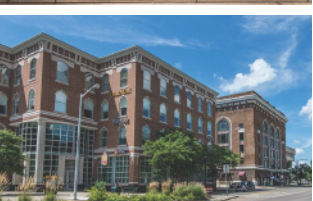
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**PUBLISHER** RON KITCHENS

“Paul Skeans was the first person to teach to me about growing as a leader.”

**EDITOR IN CHIEF** HEATHER BAKER

**CREATIVE DIRECTOR** SCOTT MILLEN

“Charles Young believed in and fostered the best work out of me. Thanks, Charles!”

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**COVER STORY** A BRIDGE MAGAZINE PARTNERSHIP  
TED ROELOFS

“Cheryl Pell bought me ice cream when I needed it most!”

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“Mr. Nolan inspired my creative writing talents.”

PETEY STEPHANAK – [PETEY@269MAG.COM](mailto:petey@269mag.com)

**JOBS REPORT** JILL BLAND

“Dave Mayer encouraged me to become the statistician for the middle school wrestling team, because we can’t always be comfortable to grow and move forward.”

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## CONTRIBUTORS

“Mrs. Bradley made learning active and hands-on for energetic second graders.”

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VON WASHINGTON JR.



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**BORGESS**



BY  
HEATHER BAKER  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



# Memories of a Student

ALL GIFTS FROM MY GREAT TEACHERS

**S**OME REMEMBER THEIR FAVORITE TEACHER AS a smiling face welcoming them into the classroom

every morning. Others remember a caring teacher who took the time to listen why a spitball was shot in a certain direction rather than an issuing an immediate trip to the principal's office.

Growing up, great teachers were, of course, in my opinion, the ones who gave me good marks. Now long past my school days, I have a different perspective on who the great ones truly were. Here's who they were and why.

Mrs. Gertrude Simon's name alone made the knees of every sixth grader in my school quiver. Her white hair, wire-rimmed glasses, icy blue stare, and strictness were legendary around the halls of St. Lawrence Elementary School. She taught science; or rather, she demanded that science become every middle schooler's primary concern. Tests were feared for their difficulty, and to pass them required no less than three hours of studying the night before. Because of Mrs. Simon, I learned to assimilate huge

amounts of information quickly—information such as the differences between cirrus, stratus, and cumulus clouds. Mrs. Simon gave me the gift of good study habits. She also gave me the gift of facing my fear of public speaking head on—first, by actually speaking to her and, second, by presenting my original scientific hypotheses and corresponding projects to the judging panel at the state science fair in which she had engineered my entrance.

Next up was Mr. Weston, my freshman geography teacher. He's the one who got

is on a reboot of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* and need to “Phone-a-Friend,” call me. Because of him, I will never forget the phrase: “Go Back, Enter Hall, North Corridor Please.” As it happens, the countries of Central America correlate to the first letter of each word in that strange phrase: Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. The memorization tricks that Mr. Weston revealed to me have proven invaluable throughout life, allowing me to pretty much remember anything when absolutely necessary.

my college major. She also knew that when the AP test signups happened, I hadn't signed up. During the week leading up to the test, I was already involved in a scholarship competition that would leave no time to focus on the test. When Miss Gomis got the registration list and my name wasn't on it, she freaked. She called my house, at a time when the phone was still attached to the wall, and I had to speak to her in front of my mother. Miss Gomis asked for me, crying, and told me that she paid the \$55 for my test, since I obviously “missed” sign-ups. Now, I freaked. In 1988, \$55

was more like \$113.

Coming from a frugal family, that was a lot of money. I was going to have to take that test, because clearly I had to pay her back—with my mother's money. My

mother would, in turn, make me earn every bit of her hard-earned \$55 back in future college credits by taking that test. With no time to prepare for the test, Miss Gomis unknowingly gave me the gift of confidence in my inherent knowledge. So, I trudged off with my

**For me, the great teachers were the ones who made my life really hard. These great teachers are the ones that I will never forget.**

me to identify where all the countries are on a globe. I admit I probably couldn't do it today, since the Cold War's end and countless boundary skirmishes have mixed things up. But if you are ever asked where Belize

Miss Gomis, my 12th grade Advanced Placement (AP) European History teacher, entered my life next. By the time the final semester of her class rolled around, she knew of my love for history and that it would be



No. 2 pencils and took that test simply prepared with all of the knowledge I hoped I had accumulated throughout the year. Later, that summer, Miss Gomis called, again crying; I had passed with the highest test score possible.

I entered college having received nothing less than an A on an essay ever, until my professor in English 114 entered my life. On my first freshman English paper, I received a B. As someone quite competitive, you can image my horror. After getting over the B, I respectfully approached him and asked why a B-grade was given to a paper that had no other red marks upon it. He confirmed that my paper was perfectly written, but that it offered no original thought. My professor asked me what I thought of the book that was the center of my essay. At that point, I confirmed to him that it was the worst book I had

“If you are ever asked where Belize is on a reboot of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* and need to ‘Phone-a-Friend’, call me.”

ever read, supplying multiple reasons in one 10-minute, long-winded breath. He said, “That, my dear, was worth an A!” From then on, he gave me the gift of confidence in my own thoughts and the courage to defend them.

Lastly, there was Jonathan D. Spence, author of the 912-page masterpiece *The Search for Modern China*. My college required me to take history classes outside of my area of specialization, and Chinese history qualified. The requirements to pass his class centered on performance on three tests. Each test was composed of only three questions. Three “words” made up each question—a person’s name or concept counted as one word—and there wasn’t even a question mark involved. A test taker’s task was to weave a compelling argument about how all three “words” were connected. That’s it. You simply had to come to

the test armed with the knowledge of everything within the 912 pages in his book, hope he picked nine “words” that you knew, and get writing. Because of Professor Spence, I am able to make eloquent connections on paper between seemingly unrelated things.

For me, the great teachers were the ones who made my life really hard and uncomfortable. Really, really uncomfortable. They are the ones who taught me skills beyond those that appear in any textbook. Skills that enable me to do my job every day and skills that I share with my kids. Those great teachers are the ones that I will never forget.

READ ON,

*Heather*

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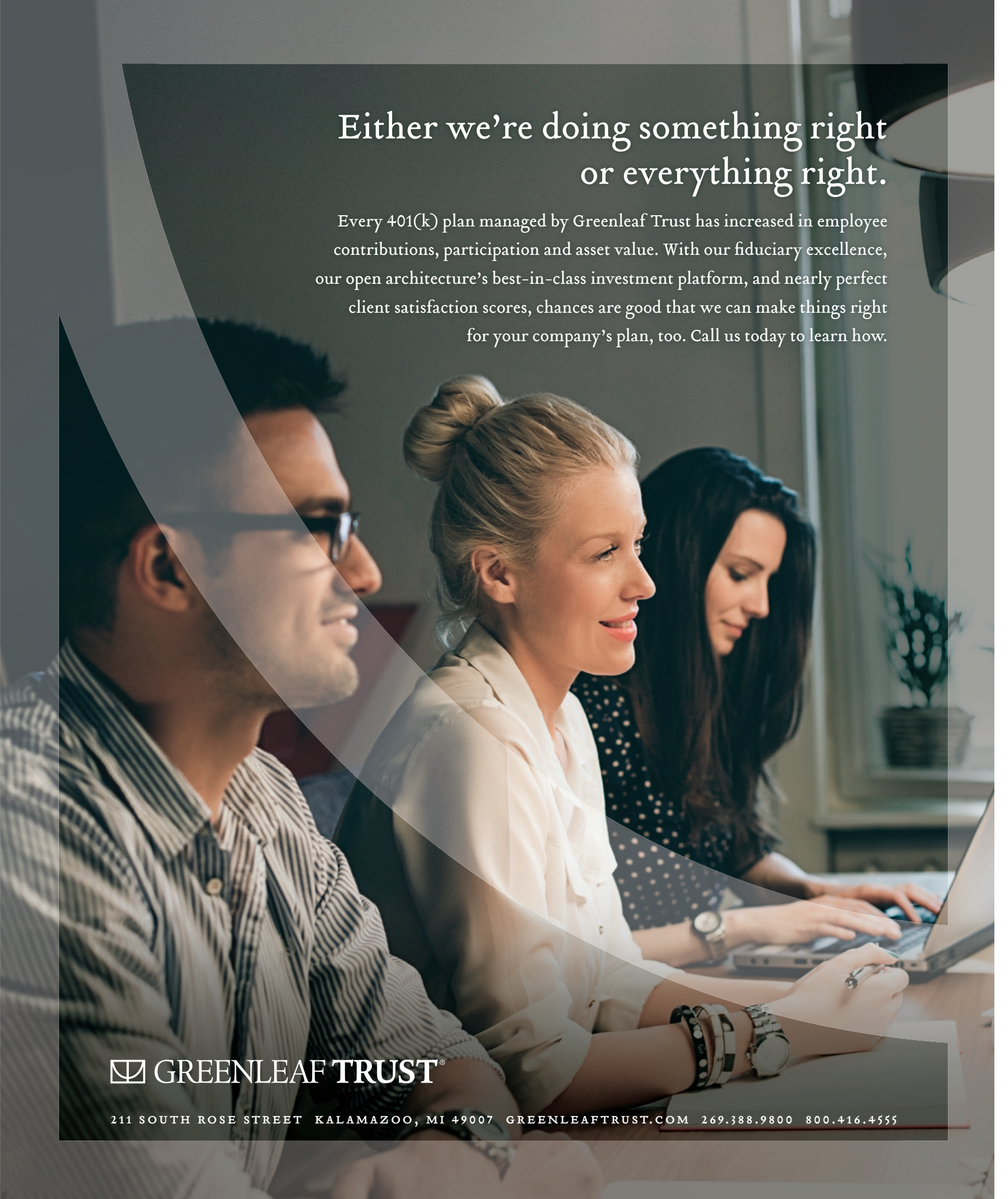
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# What would have the greatest impact on raising regional educational attainment levels?

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**DR. RANDY DAVIS** / Superintendent / **Marshall Public Schools**



**WE MUST INCREASE RELEVANCE IN THE CONTENT TAUGHT** and in the methods used to educate our young people in becoming career- and college-ready.

We know that employers and colleges/universities alike are looking for the same 21st-century skills in our high school graduates: the ability to communicate effectively, to analyze and synthesize from multiple sources, to think critically and solve problems on their own and in teams, to adapt to

emerging situations and apply their knowledge creatively, and to demonstrate personal responsibility and integrity in the work they perform. To effectively teach these 21st-century skills and more, we need to build better partnerships with business, manufacturing, and the skilled trades to bring real-world relevance back into our classrooms.

*Dr. Randy Davis is a commissioner on Governor Snyder's 21st Century Education Commission.*

**GRACE LUBWAMA** / Chief Operating Officer / **YMCA Kalamazoo**



**WE, AS A COMMUNITY, MUST BE INTENTIONAL** in focusing on the well-being of students/children from the beginning. We must work to identify the barriers to attaining this goal, especially for our most vulnerable community members.

As a community, we are so fortunate to have The Kalamazoo Promise, but our challenge is whether the Promise is a tangible gift for all families. How can we share resources to ensure

that families have the tools to be successful at attaining their educational goals?

We must focus on removing barriers for students and their families — first by creating social, physical, and economical environments that promote healthy well-being for all, and second by addressing the whole spectrum of students' education.

**DAVE CAMPBELL** / Superintendent / **Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency**



**THE MOST IMPACTFUL THING WE COULD DO AS A STATE** is to ensure that all young people have excellent teachers who are thoroughly trained and invested in the success of their students.

The top-performing nations have designed their systems of education in order to recruit and retain enough outstanding educators so that every student has an excellent teacher every hour of the day. Michigan suffers from acute teacher

shortages (particularly in urban and rural areas) in the areas of math, science, special education, and career and technical education. We need to restructure how we recruit, retain, and develop teachers so every school is staffed with the appropriate number of highly trained educators to meet the needs of all children.

*Dave Campbell is a commissioner on Governor Snyder's 21st Century Education Commission.*

**SANDRA STANDISH** / Executive Director / **Kalamazoo County Ready 4s**



**THERE'S NO EASY ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION**, so I'm going to focus on one area that schools *and* communities must focus on if seriously interested in improving outcomes for children: strengthening vocabulary development of our earliest learners.

Developing strong reading skills is critical to a child's future success, and we know that children who enter school

having been exposed to millions and millions of words find greater academic success, as strong vocabularies provide a wonderful foundation for learning how to read. Supporting high-quality pre-kindergarten learning experiences is one of the most proactive approaches a community can take in supporting children and education.

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COVER STORY

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# POWERFUL WEAPON

## NEEDS SHARPENING

PLENTY OF HOMEWORK AHEAD TO FIX EDUCATION IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN AND STATEWIDE **BY TED ROELOFS | BRIDGE MAGAZINE**

PHOTOS BY HANNAH ZIEGELER & ISTOCK

# 30,000

FOUR-YEAR-OLDS NOT IN SCHOOL  
DUE TO LACK OF STATE FUNDING (AS OF 2012)

# 21,000

ADDITIONAL AT-RISK STUDENTS FROM  
LOW-INCOME FAMILIES NOW HAVE ACCESS TO A  
STATE-FUNDED PRESCHOOL PROGRAM (AS OF 2014)

“In light of strong evidence that quality early childhood education is a driver of later academic success, it’s arguably one of the best investments the state can make.”

# S

**OUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA MIGHT HAVE EXPRESSED IT BEST:**

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Exchange “the world” for “Southwest Michigan” in that sentence, and the point remains just as valid. Education—especially the foundation of early childhood and K–12 education—is critical to both the children and the future of this region. After all, businesses of all types depend on employees with full skills and knowledge to do their jobs—whether it’s the college-educated software engineer or the operator of computer-controlled machine tools.

In that respect, there are both showcases of promising achievement and notable gaps—in this region and statewide—that leave considerable room for improvement.

Schools like Bloomingdale Middle and High School in Van Buren County are overachieving—exceeding the norm for academic performance given the high percentage of students on free and reduced lunch.

On the other hand, in more than a dozen high schools within the region, less than half of students are deemed college-ready in math, reading, science, and English. In some schools, less than 10 percent are deemed college-ready in those subjects.

Meantime, statewide standardized test scores have fallen to among the worst in the nation.

And school funding remains a challenge, both statewide and within the region.

Overall, Michigan ranked 22nd in the nation in K–12 per pupil funding in 2014, at \$11,110 per student. That was on par with the national average of \$11,009 per student, a figure that includes basic spending for classroom instruction, as well as bond issues, building levies, and millages for special education and vocational education. But Michigan’s rank in funding fell from 14th in per pupil spending a decade earlier.

The 1994 reform of K–12 funding in Michigan was supposed to level out spending for classroom

instruction in districts. To a degree, it has. But like elsewhere in the state, there are still disparities within the region in per pupil funding. For example, New Buffalo Area Schools gets more than \$10,000 in state and local funding per pupil for classroom instruction, while most districts in the region get about \$7,500.

Funding disparity shows up in millage support for career and technical training and in special education as well. In Southwest Michigan, for example, four of seven counties have no millage support for career training, limiting the scope of their programs.

But it’s probably best to start at the beginning, in light of strong evidence that quality early childhood education is a driver of later academic success. It’s arguably one of the best investments the state can make.

### **PRESCHOOL: GREAT PROGRESS ON A GREAT START**

Research developed for the Michigan Department of Education found that 58 percent of Pre-K Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) students graduated



### OFF TO A GOOD START

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN IS IN MUCH BETTER SHAPE THAN IT WAS A FEW YEARS AGO



from high school on time, compared to 43 percent who were not GSRP students. The difference was even more dramatic for children of color, as 60 percent of minority GSRP participants graduated from high school on time, compared to 37 percent for non-participants. Second grade teachers rated GSRP graduates higher on being able to learn, retain learning, and maintain good attendance than non-GSRP graduates. A higher percentage of fourth grade GSRP graduates passed the MEAP test than non-GSRP graduates.

In terms of getting kids off to a good start in school, Southwest Michigan is in much better shape than it was a few years ago.

A 2012 *Bridge Magazine* investigation found that 30,000 4-year-olds, who qualified for free, high-quality day care, weren't in classrooms due to lack of state funding. In response, Gov. Rick Snyder and the Michigan Legislature approved \$130 million per year in additional funds to boost Pre-K access. As a result, 21,000 more students gained access to the state preschool program, which is geared toward at-risk students from low-income families. It became the largest

preschool expansion in the nation, and the investment has now totaled more than a half a billion dollars.

Southwest Michigan added 3,133 GSRP slots from 2012 to 2014, an increase of 105 percent. By county, the increase ranged from 14 percent in Berrien County, which increased from 643 slots in 2012 to 735 in 2014, to 200 percent in Kalamazoo County, which climbed from 703 slots in 2012 to 2,111 in 2014. Statewide, the number of GSRP slots rose by 106 percent, from 29,324 in 2012 to 60,461 in 2014.

Pat Sargent, state coordinator of GSRP, explained that Berrien County's expansion was limited by the decision of a Head Start grantee not to work with

“The Michigan Legislature’s boost to Pre-K funding became the **largest preschool expansion in the nation**, and the investment has now totaled more than half a billion dollars.”

the Berrien Regional Education Service Agency to create a blended GSRP–Head Start program. Sargent said the district was further limited because only five of 35 potential community partners met quality requirements, of which two are current partners in the program.

On the other hand, Sargent said, “Kalamazoo was poised for expansion.”

That’s because the Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency (KRESA) serves as the federal Head Start grantee for the area and had worked over years to develop a community-designed organization to coach and mentor local Pre-K day care providers to achieve high quality standards.

As a result, Sargent said, “quite a few” met quality standards to qualify as GSRP sites.

### K-12: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IS FADING FAST

At the next education level—K–12—judging academic performance of schools and individual districts can be a tricky enterprise, largely because extensive research has found a close tie between school achievement and the wealth status—or amount of poverty—of parents. Schools do not perform in a vacuum.

For example, the 2012 SAT scores for U.S. college-bound seniors showed strong correlation between the income level of parents and scores on math, reading, and writing. Students whose parents made less than \$20,000 scored at the bottom, while students whose parents earned more than \$200,000 were at the top. The correlation prevailed through all income levels.

And so while it’s worth singling out schools in Southwest Michigan with



the highest raw achievement scores, it's perhaps more instructive to look at academic performance in context.

At Bloomingdale Middle and High School, 71 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, which is available to children from families at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. That ranked eighth highest among 60 high schools within Southwest Michigan. Yet *Bridge Magazine*—using its Academic State Champs metric—ranked the school No. 1 in the region for academic achievement when accounting for its relatively high percentage of poverty. It scored 123.8 on the ASC scale.

Juniors who took the ACT test at the school had a composite score of 19.5, which ranked 28th in the region. On the English test, they scored 19.6, 23rd

For perspective, the average U.S. ACT composite score in 2015 was 21, while the states of Massachusetts and Connecticut each had average composite scores of 24.4—tops in the nation. Michigan's average composite score—20.1—was below the national average.

There is a wide, and troubling, variation within Southwest Michigan in the share of college-bound students who test ready for college. At the top end, well over half of New Buffalo Area Schools students who took the ACT scored as college-ready, averaging 57 percent in math, 60 percent in reading, 55 percent in science, and 88 percent in English. But just 7 percent of Battle Creek Central High School students who took the ACT tested college-ready in math, 12 percent in reading, 7 percent in science, and 20 percent in English.

THE NUMBER OF MICHIGAN'S EIGHTH-GRADE MATH STUDENTS IN THE 75TH PERCENTILE OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE RANKED

9TH  
IN THE NATION IN 2003...

BUT FELL TO  
30TH  
A DECADE LATER IN 2013.

a number of academic proficiency metrics in grade school and middle school. That's a race it can ill afford to lose.

In 2003, Michigan white students tied for seventh in fourth-grade math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which compares student performance across the country. Ten years later, Michigan fourth graders tied for 35th. African-American students in Michigan ranked 26th in fourth-grade math 2003. In 2013, they were tied for last in the nation among 44 states that reported NAEP scores.

In 2003, Michigan ranked ninth nationally in the number of eighth-grade math students in the 75th percentile of academic performance in Michigan—in other words, those considered above average. A decade later, Michigan ranked 30th on the same measure.

#### SCHOOL FUNDING: MICHIGAN'S OLD MODEL ISN'T HOLDING UP WELL

Twelve years ago, Michigan spent \$9,072 per pupil on K–12 education, 110 percent of the national average

**Michigan as a whole is slipping behind in a number of academic proficiency metrics in grade school and middle school. That's a race it can ill afford to lose.**

in the region. Overall, their average composite ACT scores outperformed more than a dozen high schools with lower percentages of students from poor families.

New Buffalo Senior High School in Berrien County posted the highest raw ACT composite score among schools in the region, with an average score of 23.4. By comparison, 36 percent of its students qualify for free or reduced lunch. It ranked second on the Academic State Champs scale, with a score of 115.7.

Mattawan High School in Van Buren County ranked second in ACT composite score, with an average of 22.9. But it ranked 25th on the Academic State Champs scale, with a score of 105.3. That's largely because it has a far smaller share of students from poor families, with just 11.9 percent eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Moreover, in a dozen high schools within the region, more than half of college-bound students tested below college-ready in all four subject areas—a sobering indication that too many graduates will struggle in college. More than half of students at many more schools tested below college ready in at least three of four subject areas.

Meanwhile, there is additional data that Michigan as a whole is slipping behind in



of \$8,287 per pupil. But by 2014, its spending of just over \$11,000 per student was about equal to the national average. During that time, eight states that had been behind Michigan in K–12 spending passed Michigan.

In July, a *Bridge Magazine* analysis concluded that Michigan would need to add at least \$1.4 billion a year for its public schools to meet the recommendations in a June report prepared for the state by a Denver-based education consulting firm.

The study concluded that many Michigan districts are underfunded and that funding disparities between school districts are growing.

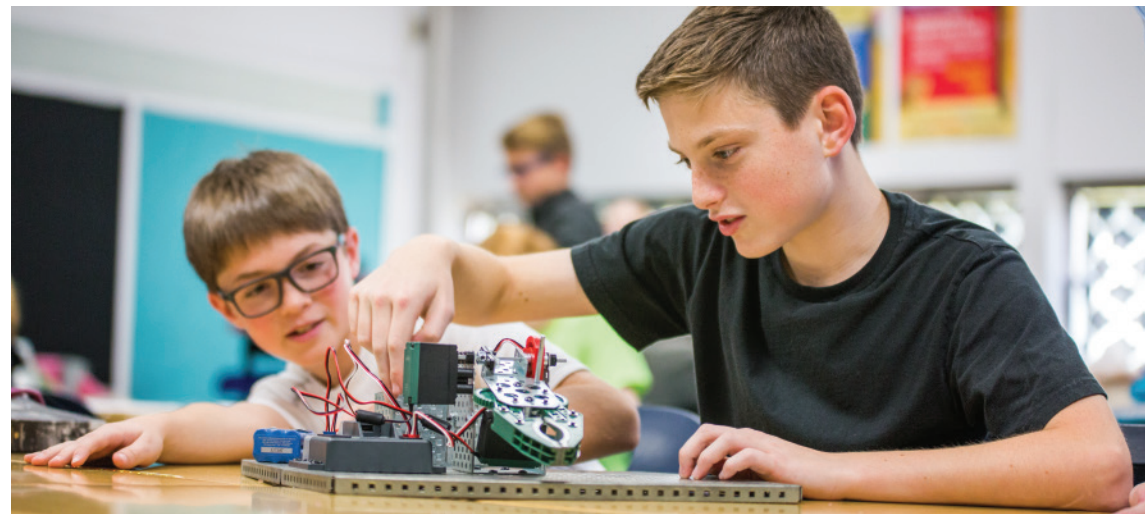
Using that study's recommendations as a guideline, *Bridge Magazine* calculated that Kalamazoo Public Schools would need \$7.3 million more than its \$125.7 million in state and local funding for 2014–15. By the same calculation, Battle Creek Public Schools would need \$4 million more than its \$47.6 million

After voters approved Proposal A in 1994—revamping Michigan's school funding formula—several dozen high-spending districts were tagged “hold harmless” districts, allowing them to ask voters for additional property tax so they would not have to cut funding.

New Buffalo Area Schools is among at least 50 such districts in Michigan, which allows it to collect \$10,014 in state and local funds per pupil. Bridgman Public Schools gets \$8,234 per pupil, Kalamazoo \$7,738, St. Joseph Public Schools \$7,517. All other districts get \$7,511.

### WIDE FUNDING DISPARITIES FOR VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

There are even wider disparities in tax funding for vocational programs in Michigan's 56 Intermediate School Districts (ISDs). Formed in 1962 by legislation that abolished the state's existing 83 county districts, ISDs conduct student counts for each individual school district within their



in state and local funding, while Van Buren Public Schools would need \$5.9 million more than its \$44.5 million in state and local funding.

Yet Michigan's school funding formula still allows some districts to enjoy considerable funding advantages over others.

jurisdiction, oversee special education, and operate career training programs.

The ISD system is built around a paradigm that governs education in this state: local control. As thinking about the possibilities of vocational education became more ambitious, many intermediate districts passed millages in the 1960s and 1970s to expand career programs. Others did not.

**53**  
INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

**23**  
OF THESE DISTRICTS HAVE NO DEDICATED MILLAGE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

It is no accident that many of the best programs are tied to substantial tax support.

Of the 56 intermediate school districts, 23 have no dedicated millage for vocational education. Within Southwest Michigan, four ISDs—Berrien, Lewis Cass, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph—have no millage to support vocational education.

In contrast, Branch ISD levies 4.2 mills

robotic welding equipment, virtual paint programs, and an ambulance built into one of the classrooms.

Districts without a dedicated millage for vocational education often rely instead on payments from individual school districts within their borders that can range up to \$2,000 per student per course. But without a dedicated revenue stream, many ISDs cannot afford the equipment and qualified instructors a top program demands.

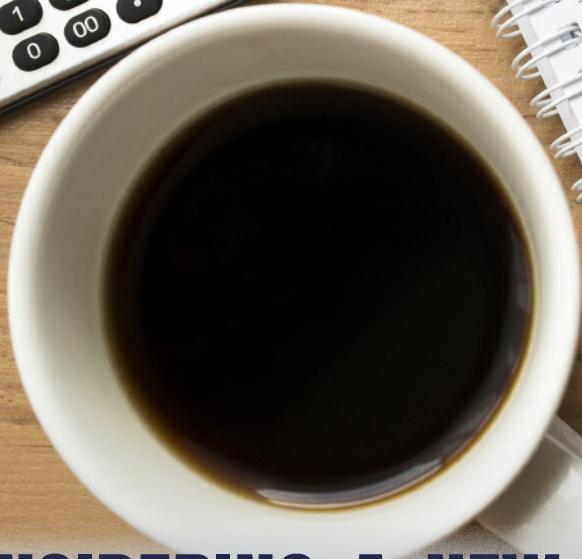
With the shifting demands of the work force and nearly 100,000 job openings in Michigan listed on the Pure Michigan Talent Connect database, including fields like welding, computer-aided machining, and the construction trades, comprehensive vocational programs are less a luxury than a critical need—especially for students who are not college bound.

William Miller, executive director of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, said the system is something well short of fair and equitable. Miller told *Bridge Magazine* in 2015, “Let’s just put it this way: the funding inequities are enormous.”

One need only look at tax revenue within Southwest Michigan's ISDs for proof of that statement. In 2016, the Branch ISD generated \$1,757 per pupil—one of the highest in the state. At the bottom end in Southwest Michigan, the Lewis Cass ISD generated \$519 per pupil, while Van Buren generated \$1,420 per pupil, St. Joseph \$629, Berrien \$688, Kalamazoo \$958, and Calhoun \$977.

This ISD funding disparity also shows up on another level—the amount per pupil generated by 1 mill. Within the 56 Michigan ISDs, that ranges from a low of \$139 in the Genesee ISD to a high of \$576 per pupil in the Charlevoix-Emmet ISD. Within Southwest Michigan, it ranges from \$162 per pupil in the Calhoun ISD to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58



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COVER STORY VIEWPOINT

# Nicole Baker Fulgham

FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT,  
THE EXPECTATIONS PROJECT  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

**THE EXTREME DISPARITIES IN AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS** may be one of the biggest issues facing our nation today. As Christians we're called to respond.

In some public schools we see a future full of promise. Amazing teachers. Challenging classes. High graduation rates. Rigorous learning preparing students for college and beyond. But for students growing up in poverty, often attending schools less than a ZIP code away, public education looks a lot different. Low expectations. High dropout rates. Children unprepared to achieve their dreams. It's a tale of two public school systems, where the ZIP code you're born into often determines your academic destiny, and usually directly along lines of race and class. But that's not the end of the story.

More than 60 years after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down segregated public schools as "inherently unequal," the lived experience

of millions of students is still separate and radically unequal. A recent government report found that 16 percent of public schools have high concentrations of poor and black or Hispanic students, up from 9 percent at the start of the millennium. Low-income children are already three grade levels behind their peers in wealthier communities by the time they reach fourth grade. Only half graduate from high school and one in 10 of them finish college. Surely, this breaks God's heart.

At the Expectations Project, we believe people of faith can be a major catalyst for change on this issue. Many congregations are already making a difference through forms of compassionate service: church-school partnerships, after-school programs, mentoring initiatives, and offering meals for students when school isn't in session. Our dream is to build on this amazing foundation by equipping people to engage in faithful advocacy: to learn about and advocate for reforms that can be game-changers for students.

Here are a few areas of policy change that are proven to make a difference:

### 1) EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Here's what we know. Ages 0 through 5 are the most critical years for child brain development. We also know that by age 3, children born into low-income families heard roughly 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers, and that this "word gap" is directly connected to the achievement gap in school and in life. In many states and cities, there are neither

**Our dream is to build on this amazing foundation by equipping people to engage in faithful advocacy: to learn about and advocate for reforms that can be game-changers for students.**

enough early childhood education seats available for low-income kids, or, if they have them, they're not as high quality as they could be. Fortunately, the issue is getting a lot of attention nationally, and uniting people across political differences. It's an issue whose time has come, but people need to step up and advocate for it.

### 2) TRAUMA INFORMED SCHOOLS

Research shows that students of color are suspended at much higher rates than their white peers, usually for the exact same behavior. Suspensions are often the result of behaviors rooted in deeper socio-emotional trauma that affects too many children growing up in poverty. At The Expectations Project, we advocate for eliminating "no excuse" or "zero tolerance" suspension policies. Sometimes suspensions are necessary, but suspensions for smaller infractions should be reconsidered given the repercussions for so many students who are already living on the margins: increasing the likelihood of them getting suspended again, dropping out of high school, entering the juvenile justice system, and further reinforcing what's often been called the "school-to-prison pipeline."

### 3) HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS

Studies point to teachers as the most significant "in-school" variable that can improve student achievement. Teacher effectiveness matters even more for students who are far behind academically. Our nation needs to invest in increasing the support and training we provide for teachers. I often hear from good teachers who say they need more support and training so that they can continue to grow and develop into amazing teachers.

This starts before teachers even arrive in the classroom. It goes back to colleges of education. Teachers are often trained to be generalists, which is an important place to begin. To be a good teacher you have to learn

methodology, pedagogy, and solid general teaching techniques. But if we're going to provide the type of rigor and excellence our kids

need in this emerging global economy, we also have to ensure that teachers are experts, particularly at the secondary level. Those teaching grades nine through twelve should really go in depth into their subject matter. If you're teaching chemistry, that means really taking an in-depth look into chemistry.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58



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**iii**  
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COVER STORY VIEWPOINT

# Von Washington Jr.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS, THE KALAMAZOO PROMISE

KALAMAZOO, MI

## A CHALLENGE FACING MOST COMMUNITIES

**TODAY** is finding ways to improve education for all students. The goal is to provide worthwhile learning opportunities that build the skills young people need to be successful in college and the workplace.

Continuing education beyond high school is rapidly becoming necessary to successfully compete for jobs that provide a living wage and opportunities for growth.

It's clear that one reason for the phenomenal success of The Kalamazoo Promise lies in its all-inclusive commitment that effectively removes barriers by making a college education financially accessible.

As we have seen, The Kalamazoo Promise has had some remarkable benefits: It not only lifts the quality of life for the individual, providing the promise of higher education and meaningful employment, but

it also ensures a well-educated workforce in a place where people want to live and new businesses want to locate.

The potential for a vibrant, sustainable community is unlimited.

Yet that potential won't be realized without some additional effort on our part.

Education has become our national human capital strategy. But community transformation and an effort to increase the pool of talented workers, ultimately, are a local responsibility.

And, like many other communities, our educational system faces enormous challenges. Achievement gaps are of great concern, along with the fact that at-risk students are less likely to succeed in their academic pursuits.

Clearly, business and education partnerships are vital to progress. These partnerships require self-evaluation, commitment, and a willingness by those who have a vested interest in the community to work together collaboratively for change.

Self-evaluation requires looking at your entire organization for inclusiveness and developing strategies to ensure opportunities for all.

Commitment requires being open to changing practices that may have been in place for years and bringing more resources to the table.

Collaboration between businesses, educational institutions, and nonprofit

**Education has become our national human capital strategy. But, community transformation and an effort to increase the pool of talented workers, ultimately, are a local responsibility.**

organizations can energize schools and demonstrate to students that the community is supporting them. This, in turn, can strengthen the capacity of schools and educators. One example of this is MiCareerQuest Southwest, a highly collaborative effort that exposes thousands of students to hands-on, interactive, real-world careers.

After spending more than 20 years in the public school system, I made the transition to economic development. In the economic development arena, the number one take-away from my conversations with employers concerned the lack of qualified individuals coming into the workforce.

It struck me then that while I was working in the school system, I never had a conversation with employers about their needs, and, conversely, they had never spoken with me about what we were doing to prepare students to enter the work world. There was a major disconnect then. Not so today.

Recently when I was in Washington, D.C., to attend the PromiseNet conference and the Community College Summit, there was a strong focus on business and education partnerships.

It brought to mind initiatives such as Project Lead The Way, which provides transformative learning experiences for K-12 students and teachers across the U.S. This project provides teachers with the training, resources, and support they need to engage students in real-world learning. In school districts throughout Kalamazoo County, over 20 businesses and more than 100 volunteers participate in Project Lead The Way.

The need is critical for this kind of collaboration.

Teachers are working hard to educate students each and every day. Many educators share an intense desire to help students move forward in their academic

pursuits—sometimes against extreme circumstances beyond their control.

It is imperative that we find more ways to support the efforts of those who work with students every day. To do that, we must create a culture within the business community that is committed to student success. The more students that connect to this community in positive and meaningful ways, the more students will find success in the work world.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58



# FULLY VESTED IN MEASURABLE OUTCOMES.

When it comes to managing your contingent workforce, partnership is key. In every WSI partnership, key performance indicators are put in place to ensure alignment, accountability, and results.

Ready for a change? Let's chat. For a free evaluation of your current talent acquisition strategies, contact Steve Beebe at [sbeebe@wsitalent.com](mailto:sbeebe@wsitalent.com).



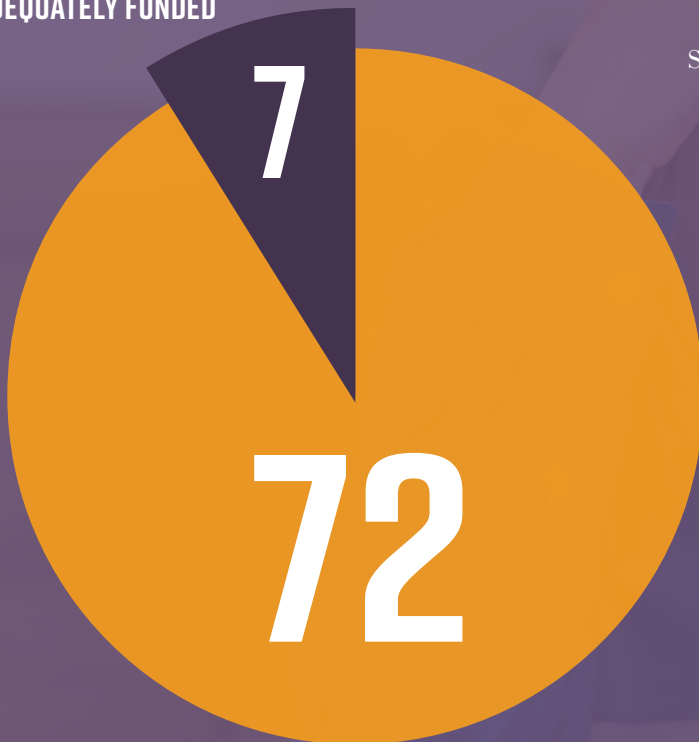


# THE GOOD NEWS...

Children who participate in high-quality pre-K programs enter school more ready than their peers. Michigan's recent investments in this area have greatly increased access in Southwest Michigan to these programs. With a direct return on investment for every pre-K dollar spent, this momentum will pay off in future dividends for our students.



SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT ARE ADEQUATELY FUNDED



MORE SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN STATISTICS ON EDUCATION FROM BRIDGE MAGAZINE CAN BE FOUND AT 269MAG.COM.

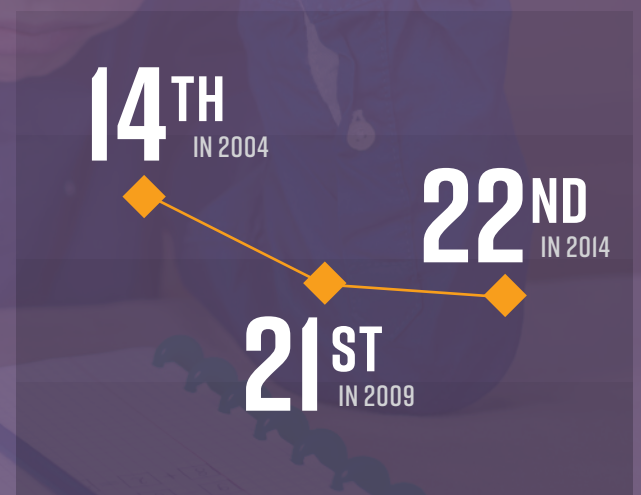
**UNDERFUNDED DISTRICTS**

RANGING FROM 0.2% TO 43.4% UNDER BUDGET

# ...AND THE NOT-SO-GOOD NEWS.

State per pupil expenditure interacts with other important education educators, such as student demographics and achievement. Students, in states where average per pupil spending is highest, typically outperform their peers in states with lower per pupil expenditures on national assessment tests. This is unfortunate news to students attending public schools in Southwest Michigan and statewide, which are underfunded compared to their peers nationwide.

**PER PUPIL FUNDING**  
(MICHIGAN'S RANKINGS AMONGST ALL 50 STATES)





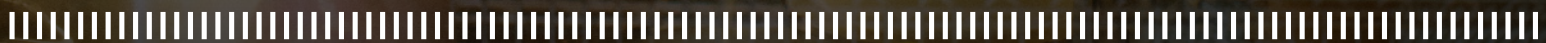
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# 2 Grilled Cheese and Tomato Soup Hot Spots

1

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2

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*thegardengriddle.com*

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# 6 Winter Ales

3

## WINTER WHITE @ BELL'S BREWERY

Embrace the cold with Winter White, a Belgian-inspired Wheat Ale, blending barley and wheat malts to brighten cloudy days.

*bellsbeer.com*

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4

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*liverybrew.com*

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5

## TINDER BOCK @ LATITUDE 42 BREWING CO.

Take on the snow with Tinder Bock, a German-style winter weizenbock, boasting a malty backbone with earthy hop aromas.

*latitude42brewingco.com*

PORTAGE | (269) 459-4242

6

## HOP ROCKET @ ARCADIA ALES

With its caramel and toffee hints, Hop Rocket balances a trio of malts with hops to craft this Imperial IPA.

*arcadiaales.com*

KALAMAZOO | (269) 276-0458

BATTLE CREEK | (269) 963-9690

7

## HI-TECH REDNECK @ ROUND BARN BREWERY

A Kentucky-Style Common Ale, the Hi-Tech Redneck is a unique seasonal brew, hinting at chocolate, molasses, and rye.

*drinkmichigan.com/round-barn*

BARODA | (269) 326-7059

8

## JADIS @ GREENBUSH BREWING CO.

A wintry mix of wheat malts, cardamom, clove, and orange zest creates Jadis, a Winter White Ale special.

*greenbushbrewing.com*

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9

### MEYER BROADWAY PARK

Hold onto your hat as you fly downhill on tubes provided for a day of high-speed wintry fun.

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11

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*timberridgeski.com*  
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12

### BITTERSWEET SKI AREA

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*skibittersweet.com/pages/home.cfm*  
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10

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13

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# 9

## Spots to Enjoy the Snow



14

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17

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15

### 24TH ANNUAL ICE BREAKER FESTIVAL

As Lake Michigan's ice begins to break, South Haven celebrates with ice sculpture displays and a chili cook-off—February 3 to 5, 2017.

*southhavenmi.com/pages/IceBreaker*  
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16

### DR. T.K. LAWLESS PARK

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# Career Lesson Plans

MICAREERQUEST SOUTHWEST DELIVERS REAL-WORLD CAREER DISCOVERY AT THE INTERSECTION OF EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY / BY 269 MAGAZINE TEAM / PHOTOS BY BARRY ELZ / ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM ROSSI



**W**HEN HE WAS NAMED PRESIDENT OF HUMPHREY PRODUCTS IN APRIL 2016,

Dave Maurer inherited the desk of his recently retired predecessor. Within its drawers, Maurer found a sheaf of papers from 1998 describing a group of industry partners trying to solve a labor shortage. To Maurer's eyes, the problem seemed painfully familiar.

"There is a lot that happens when companies go through these business

cycles. We gain a lot of momentum during the upturns. When things turn down, we get very short-sighted and we stop a lot of the energy," Maurer said. He found inspiration from this dilemma and admitted thinking to himself, "You know, we have to persist through this, regardless of the business cycle. These kinds of short-term interruptions shouldn't interrupt what needs to be very long-term plans for career and tech education and for engaging young people."

While the need for a deeper labor pool has ebbed and flowed over time, industry's solution to the problem has evolved. In 2011, a consortium of companies and education institutions started to brainstorm ways to bridge the labor gap in Southwest Michigan. One emerging idea was to funnel interested and qualified middle and high school students toward technical careers. Most recently, and serving as a kind of capstone of the ongoing effort, the consortium launched a program called MiCareerQuest

Southwest. The first MiCareerQuest Southwest took place in February 2016; a second event was held in November 2016 and will be repeated each fall moving forward.

MiCareerQuest Southwest is an interactive, tactile, informational career- and college-readiness fair. It aims to introduce middle and high school students to career options including, but also beyond, the paradigm of college preparatory courses and the path of a four-year

liberal arts degree. Over two days in November 2016, 5,000 eighth and ninth graders from Kalamazoo County and surrounding school districts descended on the Kalamazoo County Expo Center for a hands-on look at careers in various technical fields. The organizing consortium includes

Aviation, in partnership with the Western Michigan University (WMU) College of Aviation and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), used an onsite airplane to showcase educational and employment opportunities. WMU's College of Engineering and Applied Sciences displayed a solar

students uninspired by traditional educational tracks, some of my own children included, to pursue hands-on elements is what would inspire them to stay engaged in school and to persist through school."

Another firm represented at MiCareerQuest Southwest was Stryker

of inquisitive students beside a Power-Load and Power-Pro XT display inside a simulated ambulance. Then she said, "It's a simulated environment. The whole system there is to simulate what it would look like in an ambulance. This is basically all push-button, so an EMS (Emergency Medical Services) attendant wouldn't have to physically carry a patient anymore. It's a push of a button to load and unload patients."

Local firms welcomed the opportunity to communicate directly with curious students and potential future employees.

"It's really exciting to be able to show the students all these opportunities that are open to them, and it's all local businesses," Baran said. "We all support Kalamazoo, we work in

**As soon as we started doing clinicals in the ambulance and the ER, I made the decision not to pursue my scholarship with Michigan State and continue to go to KVCC's paramedic program.**

Kalamazoo Regional Education Service Agency (KRESA), Southwest Michigan First, and Michigan Works! Southwest, among others from the business sector.

Fifty-five employers from four industry areas—Arts & Communication; Business, Technology, & Human Services; Engineering & Manufacturing; and Health & Natural Sciences—filled 50,000 square feet of convention center space. Area employers sponsoring exhibits and demonstrations included Stryker Corporation, Pfizer Inc., Flowserve Corporation, Humphrey Products, Accu-Mold, CSM Group, Borgess|Ascension, Gull Lake Animal Hospital, TowerPinkster, and the Home Builders Association of Western Michigan. Among the exhibits, Duncan

car. Demonstrating to students the progression from classroom and hands-on laboratory experiences to the real world, Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) booths showcased manufacturing and health field program offerings alongside employer booths.

Humphrey Products, a 100-year-old, Kalamazoo-based pneumatics manufacturer, was one of the 55 companies at MiCareerQuest Southwest. "One of the things that breaks my heart is seeing some of the levels of kids dropping out of our schools," Maurer said, shouting over the sound of impact wrenches, generators, pounding nails, and adolescent shrieks at the Expo Center. "I can't help but think that, by encouraging

Corporation, with exhibits demonstrating both manufacturing and research. Veronica Baran, a manufacturing engineer at Stryker, paused for a barrage



Kalamazoo, and it's something that they might not be exposed to normally. They really wanted to know what we do every day, what it took to get there, and what (education) you need. They thought it was neat to have all these boards up here, showing all the different job titles and what it takes to get that job. It was pretty cool to show the students that there are many options and we weren't just all about engineering."

Baran exemplified the hope shared by other exhibitors that they could influence young people as they start to make career decisions.

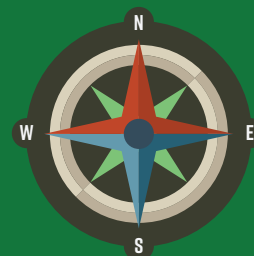


## Taking the Next Step

What it's really like to be a nurse? A graphic artist? A mechanical engineer? A builder? Or, to manufacture a dashboard for a car or surgical instrument for the operating room?

For Southwest Michigan middle and college students like Lindsay, MiCareerQuest Southwest is a place to help them figure that out and for area employers to sway the future talent pipeline in their direction.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU AS A PARENT, EMPLOYER, OR EDUCATOR CAN GET INVOLVED IN FUTURE MICAREERQUEST SOUTHWEST EVENTS, GO TO [WWW.MICAREERQUESTSW.ORG](http://WWW.MICAREERQUESTSW.ORG).



"It's exciting, because it happened for me," Baran said. "I left high school with a clear direction, knowing what I wanted to do. If I can even get one person thinking outside the box or showing them that they could have a new career choice, it's worth it. Even just to open their eyes to it, not necessarily to go into engineering if they don't want to, but just to show them all their options. It's worth it just to have the conversation with them."

administrator of KRESA's EFE. "Our goal is to help kids recognize that they have personal strengths and abilities. Sometimes in education, the young person doesn't always feel that. When they're maybe struggling in their math class, but a hands-on young person, they might come out to MiCareerQuest Southwest, build something, and be like, 'Wow, I get it!' Or, if they're interested in healthcare, exposure to applied sciences can help them start to figure out that they want to

especially in manufacturing, companies are hurting (for workers). They need young people immediately in the skilled trades. Apprenticeship programs, co-ops, summer job interns—all of those are good experiences for young people. These experiences allow them to figure out: 'Do I want to have a career in engineering manufacturing that could pay for college?' So, it's really a great experience for the young person, and it fits the needs of what companies are looking for in our area."

When Zachary Glascock, 19, was a senior at Vicksburg High School, a shop teacher recommended that he apply for a co-op position at Humphrey Products, which he got. After his co-op, he landed an engineering internship at Humphrey. He is now a sophomore at WMU studying manufacturing engineering. Glascock credits that EFE co-op as a life-altering opportunity.

do something nurturing that's valuable to helping people. So the opportunity here at this event is really for young people to interact with professionals and hear from someone who does a job they might have interest in, which is a great thing."

Luke went on to promote the benefits of the EFE program: "We recognize that,

**There are definitely a lot of things I've seen today that have changed my mind on the kind of path that I want to take.**

MiCareerQuest Southwest is a culmination of a five-year effort to merge education and industry in Southwest Michigan. One of the community players at the heart of this intersection is KRESA's Education for Employment (EFE) curriculum.

"Part of this experience is really exploratory," said Jason Luke, program



“Through the co-op, I was able to actually learn the manufacturing process more in-depth, like machine working. Basically everything that I needed to know that I couldn’t learn in a school setting, I learned through my co-op,” Glascock said. “As of right now, I’m an engineering intern at Humphrey, and I’m doing basically what an engineer would. And I’m really enjoying it. I’m doing a lot of drawing changes, 3D models, software work—it’s what I want to do when I finish my degree.”

Katie Carson, 23, graduated in 2011 from Portage Central High School. Today she works as a Level II medic with Life EMS. She, too, credits KRESA’s EFE for steering her life’s course.

“I’ve always wanted to be in the medical field,” Carson said. “I didn’t

really know what I was expecting when I went into it. As I progressed through the class, I realized it was something I wanted to do. As soon as we started doing clinicals and ride-alongs in the ambulance and in the ER (emergency room), I actually made the decision to not pursue my scholarship with Michigan State and continue to go to KVCC’s paramedic program.”

Shannon Schippers, a guidance counselor at Portage Central Middle School, said the early stages of career planning can start in eighth grade or even earlier. She uses an aptitude assessment tool, called Career Cruising, with her students. Career Cruising is an online application that asks students random questions, then matches them with potential career options. Schippers finds satisfaction in pointing out to students the careers that pop up.

“Sometimes, they’ll tell me, ‘There’s not a day in this world I would do that job.’ I tell them to pull up information on that career to see why it matched that to them,” Schippers said. Students are beginning to speculate about career options, but mostly their focus is a more immediate future. They’re thinking, “I’ve got high school coming up, and at some point I’m going to go to college or at some point I’m going to have a job,” Schippers said.

Schippers confirmed that the MiCareerQuest Southwest event was a huge opportunity for area students. “The more they can get out there and see what’s going on, all the different pathways, and how there are a lot of careers out there, the better,” she said. “This is a great opportunity for them to just see different things that you would not normally see going through school.”

Kate Lindsay is one of the students whom Schippers advises. A confident and bright-eyed eighth grader, Lindsay said she’d like to become a biochemist, but she’s open to other possibilities.

“There are definitely a lot of things that I’ve seen today that have changed my mind on the kind of the path that I want to take,” Lindsay said. “Do I want to take the chemistry path, or do I want to take the path of machinery using coding? Or photography and stuff like that, using cameras and different materials to build or create things? I will look into those (now) because I know there are a lot of career paths I can take when I’m older. Potentially, what I’m thinking in eighth grade could change from what I’ll be thinking as a senior in high school.”

# DR. MAE JEMISON

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Dr. Mae Jemison broke more than the sound barrier when she climbed aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavor in 1992. She became the first woman of color to travel into space. On March 23, she will recount her inspirational story and speak about the importance of STEM education — especially for girls and people of color — at the Kalamazoo Community Foundation’s 2017 Community Meeting.



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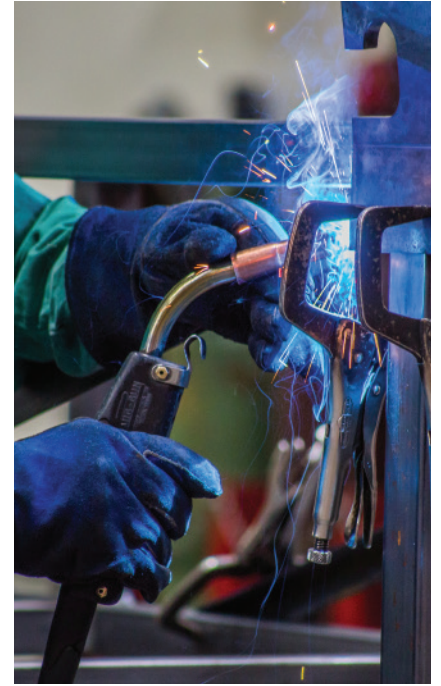
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*“I get to be creative and have fun while helping people.”*

a conversation with  
**Natalie DePerro**

**INTERIOR DESIGNER AT MARXMODA**

BY REGAN DEWALL | PHOTO BY RHINO MEDIA

**WHAT DOES AN INTERIOR DESIGNER DO?**

An interior designer takes a client's request for spaces in buildings, and gives them a great solution for furniture for their interiors while keeping in mind the client's vision and mission.

**WHAT DOES YOUR TYPICAL DAY LOOK LIKE?**

My typical day is usually spent in the office working on space planning, furniture designs, and furniture layouts. I do a lot of budget pricing for customers and furniture options—customers want to see what a lobby, an office, or a collaboration area could look like. I do renderings, which are a 3-D visual with color, lighting, furniture, and architectural features that show what a space will potentially look like.

**WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST REWARDING ABOUT YOUR JOB?**

What I find most rewarding is that I get to be creative and have a lot of fun in my job, while helping people. It's a great way to give back to the community. Whether I'm helping a corporate company or a small business, I can give back to society with a great design layout for a space by putting creative thought into it.

**WHAT SPARKS YOUR INTEREST IN INTERIOR DESIGN?**

Really fun and funky and inviting spaces that make someone want to eat, play, or work there.

**WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU ASK YOURSELF WHEN YOU SEE A SPACE?**

What drives people to want to be in a place rather than that space's competitor? What's really interesting about that place? What draws people to interiors? Why do they gravitate toward those places?

**EVERYONE HAS TO START SOMEWHERE. WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?**

My first internship was at Ethan Allen on West Main in Kalamazoo. It's a residential company. They're global.

**WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING AN INTERIOR DESIGNER?**

When I'm at work, I don't feel like I'm working. I am having fun. What excites me the most is seeing my design go from 2D and 3D computer renderings transferred to the real deal.

**WHERE DO YOU FIND INSPIRATION FOR THE DESIGNS THAT YOU CREATE?**

Besides using design literature like magazines and online literature or books, I enjoy traveling and visiting new public spaces. Recently, I went to Des Moines, Iowa, to visit my brother. I saw what was going on there, and what drew people to restaurants and bars and the breweries. It's still the Midwest, but to see what designs are looking like there, versus West Michigan, was really inspiring.

**WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN INTERIOR DESIGN?**

You need to have a sense of awareness of a person's surroundings, and how they interact in an environment, and how someone uses that environment.

**WHAT IS THE BIGGEST LESSON THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CAREER?**

Read and reread what you're doing, whether it's price books or an email or drawings or the fine print. When it comes down to the end of the day, this is your design. You have to be able to back up and have research or a reason for why you're doing something.

**HOW DO YOU BALANCE CREATIVITY WITH BUSINESS?**

You definitely have to respect and be aware of your customer's mission or style and what their business is. For example, think about a restaurant: You have fine dining restaurants and have breweries. They're both restaurants, but their styles are different. One's style may include white tablecloths, and the other's may be a hangout for friends. You have to respect who you're working with.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR CREATIVITY SHARP?**

You have to stay on top of what just came out from different manufacturers—what's the newest product, the latest technology, and how it's being integrated into furniture. It's being involved in the design world and the design community.

**IF YOU COULD BE CREATIVE IN ANOTHER SPACE, WHAT WOULD THAT BE?**

A dance teacher. I used to dance growing up, and in college I taught a couple classes.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO AN ASPIRING INTERIOR DESIGNER?**

Keep a fine line between keeping everything that you create, and not becoming a hoarder. Whether it's a scratch piece of paper, something you wrote on a napkin, a textbook, a floor plan, a fabric sample, keep everything because you will want it someday. Stay organized, because things will resurface that you will need to reference.

FOR THE FULL INTERVIEW, PLEASE VISIT [269MAG.COM](http://269MAG.COM)

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Tom Darby, his daughter, Adrien, and his son, Max, of Darby Metal Treating, Inc., with Chris Mars, Vice President, First National Bank of Michigan.

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# TIME TO ROCK REWARD — and — RECOGNITION

HOW CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE AND CLASSROOM  
INCREASES ENGAGEMENT / BY **STEFAN SCHAFFER & HEATHER BAKER**

PHOTOS BY HANNAH ZIEGLER

**“GREAT JOB!”**

When it comes to motivating team members, the simple act of offering praise and recognition for a job well done goes a long way.

Why?

Positive feedback triggers the release of dopamine, which serves as a neurotransmitter in the brain. Chemicals released in the brain stimulate feelings of happiness, innovative thinking, and creative problem solving. Beyond making people feel good, the pride, pleasure, and increased self-esteem resulting from a compliment can boost individual performance.

When praise and recognition occur regularly in the workplace, positive emotions follow and engaged cultures develop. Brad Black, president and CEO of HUMANeX Ventures and a Gallup Hall of Fame recipient for his work on designing and building a world-class leadership and human resources model, agrees: “You need to recognize reality—in every profession there is a range of performance. This range is not affected by skill or knowledge—it

is always talent.” When that performance is acknowledged, cultural engagement skyrockets.

The Gallup® organization agrees. Its studies encompass more than 4 million employees in 10,000 business units across more than 30 industries, and find that when management regularly acknowledges strong performance, productivity increases, engagement among colleagues spikes, employees are less likely to quit, customer loyalty and satisfaction surge, and accidents in the workplace decrease dramatically.

Abraxas Worldwide, in Kalamazoo, Michigan, uses tools from HUMANeX Ventures to strategically select, position, and develop people in the right roles to maximize the potential of its team.

Melanie Gilbert, administrative services associate director at Abraxas, explains one such tactic the company uses to give feedback: the company hands out diamond-shaped pads of paper to all employees, called “diamond drops.”

Gilbert says, “We encourage employees to write diamond drops (of appreciation) for their coworkers

within their departments, and outside their departments, if they see somebody doing a really great job. During our monthly company wide meetings, we encourage employees to read (out loud what they wrote on) diamond drops that they are giving to a coworker. Employees are humbled by it. They really appreciate it. You can see in the recipient’s face. It’s always how we close the meetings. It’s not only coming from management to employees, but employees giving appreciation to each other.

“From the first employee survey we rolled out in December of 2013 to where we are now, we see much higher employee satisfaction at Abraxas. Employees feel much more valued. They’re happy to work at here.”

Oftentimes, most workplaces, including schools, don’t stop to celebrate. They are too busy taking care of business, and in the educational field, that means students. In a recent Gallup poll, more than 25 million employees around the world, including over 100,000 educators, were asked what engages them at work. The lowest item rated by K–12

teachers was “in the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.”

When Gallup asked teachers to rate their principals on measures such as management style, philosophy, and school climate, the principals receiving the highest ratings were recognized for valuing “recognition as a frequent and ongoing activity that builds a strong, positive school culture” and building “an environment in which recognition is contagious and everyone plays an important role.”

Enter the Catalyst Education Awards.

Regional economic development organization Southwest Michigan First founded the awards program in 2016 with the mission to make Southwest Michigan globally recognized for preparing people to thrive in education and employment. The program hopes that by recognizing excellence practices currently taking place in local classrooms, other educators and schools will elevate their students’ performance by implementing best practices into their own classrooms and trying innovations of their own.

With a regional seasonally unadjusted jobless rate of 4.0 percent as of November 2016 across Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, and Van Buren counties, the region’s workforce is stretched to its limits. Southwest Michigan First sees the region’s K–12 educational systems as the greatest resource for talent to supply future workforce demand. According to its chief executive officer and senior partner, Ron Kitchens, “From classroom to community, we all can only grow stronger by encouraging teacher innovation and supporting leadership in our schools to produce talented

students who will excel in our schools, and upon graduation from high school, community college, or university, come to work at our great companies.

The 2017 Catalyst Education Awards honor one winning school, a principal, and three teachers. Kitchens continues, “While students receive report cards to showcase their achievements, the Catalyst Education Awards believe that teachers, principals, and schools should take time to celebrate big achievements and innovative practices, too. Many say that teaching is a calling. Because we couldn’t agree more, we proudly support the outstanding educators who have dedicated themselves to making a difference in our children’s lives.”

Children should be given the opportunity to succeed academically under any circumstance. Whether this means connecting with them personally to ensure that they’re keeping a level head amidst the social and scholastic challenges in our modern educational



environment, or immersing students in scenarios designed to strengthen skills that will be needed in their future work, build character, and promote perseverance, this year’s Catalyst Education Award winners have done everything in their power to create a habitat for student success. And while all of them have managed to win the hearts of their staff and students, each has taken a different approach in doing so.



**WINNING TEACHER**  
**Danielle**  
**Niewoonder**  
GRADE ONE  
SCHOOLCRAFT ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOLCRAFT, MI



A firm believer in “wiggle time,” **DANIELLE NIEWOONDER**, a first grade teacher at Schoolcraft Elementary, dictates that “a child’s attention span is directly related to their age, each year representing a minute of their undivided attention.” With such logic applied, Niewoonder has a full six minutes before her class starts to lose interest.

In order to accommodate their needs, Niewoonder created a wiggle-safe environment for her kids. Furnished with pull-apart desks, three different options of chairs to bounce around on, and a community cache of school supplies at the center of each desk cluster, her classroom exudes auras of comfort and acceptance. The inviting vibes are further amplified by purple walls, a reading corner with bookcases and benches built by her grandfather, and of course, a big, colorful rug at the front of the room to gather round.

The effort Niewoonder put into setting up the ambiance in her classroom is astonishing, and yet it pales in comparison to the work she put into forming her curriculum. With students at a variety of



levels across a wide range of subjects, her cardinal concern is making sure all her students are getting the help they need to succeed. In order to give her kids the best equipment around, Niewoonder has applied to pilot various educational products, and was recently approved for one-to-one computing (referred to as 1:1), which supplies each child with his or her own tablet. These tablets can then be used by Niewoonder and her students to track progress, making it much easier for both parties to understand which areas they excel in, and which could use a bit of work.

In terms of academic progression, Niewoonder believes that the most difficult aspect of first grade is

conquering the nine reading levels required to reach second grade. To ensure that all students receive the attention they need, Niewoonder and her two teammates, who also teach first grade at Schoolcraft Elementary, divide their kids into multiple reading groups based on their ability as readers. Once the divisions are made, each group addresses the problems presented at its level, overcomes them, and moves on to the next level at a pace that suits the whole group.

While Niewoonder knows the importance of her class's intellectual prowess, and has done everything in her power to help them succeed, she knows that her job extends far beyond scholasticism. First grade is the grade in which children begin to learn academically, as opposed to being taught how to interact with one another. Unfortunately, there are many cases in which kids struggle in first grade because their teachers never took the time to



establish a connection with them. Luckily for her kids, Niewoonder has vowed never to join the ranks of such educators. She holds both love and trust in high regard, hoping that all of her students will leave first grade knowing that their teacher sincerely cared about every aspect of their young lives.



**DAWN KAHLER** may not have purple paint on the walls of her eighth grade science classroom at the Milwood Magnet School, but she's still on par with Niewoonder when it comes to caring about her kids. She steps into her classroom no later than 6:00 a.m. every weekday, and spends the weekends at school preparing for the units ahead.

Strongly supportive of an educational mode that is tailored to fit the needs of each student rather than a single teacher, Kahler has become fond of Milwood's recently adopted "Growth Mindset." This attitude, which allows her to promote the progression of confidence and character as much as knowledge of natural hazards, also aided her in connecting with her students.

"It's hard to understand someone when you aren't willing to understand the community around them," said Kahler as she expressed the importance she places on her relationship with the students in her class.

Fortunately, Milwood's Growth Mindset and its critical thought-based model of learning have helped



Kahler bridge the gap between teacher and student. By requiring her students to keep journals, Kahler receives a unique glimpse into the life of each student, which helps her understand where they're coming from.

Some teachers pay no mind to the opinions held by their students, but Kahler is not among them. In fact, alongside the many distractions that they face, Kahler believes the biggest challenge for many kids is overcoming the heartache that comes along with being a young adult in this day in age. "It seems we've entered an era where people are afraid to be themselves, and instead they try to be whatever it is that people approve of, but they can't be, because that isn't who they are," Kahler responded when asked what she meant by "overcoming heartache."

The journals are a good starting point, but Kahler knows helping her kids best their personal struggles requires more than a pen and paper. She is a huge fan of one-on-one interactions, as she is able to use them to empower her students throughout their educational process. Instead of simply assigning a target for her students to reach at the end of each unit, Kahler conducts an in-depth discussion with each student. At the end of each conversation Kahler gives her students the opportunity to set their own goals, which they spend the rest of the year trying to achieve.

By allowing her kids a certain amount of control over their academic destiny, Kahler has provided them with the internal motivation that fulfills Milwood's growth mindset. In addition, giving her kids space has resulted in them picking topics they are interested in, thus improving the academic atmosphere via the

passion that surfaces once they present their finished products.

"I want all of my students to leave my classroom knowing that they matter, and that their opinions matter. More than anything, I want them to have enough confidence in themselves to stand up for the things they believe in," Kahler.

Her subject may be science, but Kahler would like to think that her students learn far more about themselves than they do about her topic.



**WINNING TEACHER**  
**Josh Doe**  
BAND DIRECTOR  
NILES HIGH SCHOOL  
NILES, MI



Over the course of his tenure as the maestro of music at Niles High School, **JOSH DOE** has doubled the number of kids in the school's band program. The sight of his classroom—packed to the brim with young adults ranging from sixth grade to 12th, all of whom reside at different spots across the spectrum of musical talent—might intimidate a lesser teacher.

On the contrary, this performer-turned-teacher embraces the many obstacles that come with his gargantuan ensemble, believing that cooperation on behalf of all its members is the only way to overcome them.

"It's messy, noisy, and there's constant movement," said Doe when asked to describe an average practice session. A strong believer in the notion that kids learn more when they are forced to challenge themselves and make mistakes, he is more than happy to deal with the ear-piercing off-notes that inevitably shriek through the air during rehearsal, knowing that such mistakes will correct themselves with enough practice. And while he is always pleased to hear his band play in perfect unison, Doe's mission as a teacher goes far deeper than simply teaching his kids how to play their instruments.

"There is no proven Mozart effect," Doe admitted when asked about the relationship between music and academia. That said, he holds fast to the belief that picking up an instrument can, and very often

does, dramatically improve a child's life. That improvement comes with students choosing to be a part of something bigger than themselves, thus having to adapt to the needs of their bandmates.

Doe made a point of mentioning how accommodating his administrative staff has been to him and his students, bringing up a particular instance in which the band couldn't find buses to take them to the state festival.

"At the drop of a hat our administration spent \$1,500 on charter busses to get us there," Doe reflected.

The administration has helped him out in a number of other ways, chiefly supplying his students with their instruments. In return, Doe and his group of merry minstrels have taken a previously lackluster program and polished it into the school's crown jewel.



Collaboration is key for **JIM FRENCH** and his close-knit staff at Portage Northern High School. A lifelong Southwest Michigan local, now principal at Portage Northern, French adamantly disagrees with the self-described "beatings will continue until morale improves" model of education that he grew up in. Instead, French wants his students to feel appreciated and accepted, and hopes to teach them the values of good character and perseverance.

French receives an incredible amount of support from his staff, taking the word "Pride" to a whole new level. Sure, every school has pride, but you'd be hard pressed to find one that uses the word synonymously with its mission statement. The staff at Portage Northern has broken down "Pride" into a five-pronged matrix that urges staff and students alike to be positive



camera phones and various social media outlets, teachers at Portage Northern have turned traditional classroom distractions into useful tools that promote participation in the classroom. The staff's decision to accommodate students has a reciprocal effect in that students are more likely to appreciate their teachers' efforts, thus creating a base to establish strong student-teacher relationships.

Establishing such relationships is a necessary step in teaching kids how to persevere, which in French's opinion may be the most important aspect of modern education. Worried that our nation's attitude is one of "don't make mistakes because failing can be painful," French hopes that his kids realize that learning how to dissect problems based on lessons learned from past mistakes is exponentially more rewarding than living a life in which failure is unacceptable. He has but one message for parents when it comes to mistakes: "Let your children make them."

and respectful, show initiative as well as determination, and be engaged in the learning process.

The staff has definitely kept their part of the bargain. By utilizing modern technologies, such as



In similar fashion to French and his staff, the **COMSTOCK STEM ACADEMY**, which provides a unique take on K-8 education, was founded upon the idea that students should learn how to adapt to and persevere through our world's many challenges. Presided over by Director Chris Chopp, the academy's curriculum is rooted in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. And though these four areas of study are often thought of as analytic rather than creative, the team at Comstock has made a point of being an exception to such opinions.

By introducing students to a LEGO® room, in which kids are asked to build scenes that were read to them out of a storybook, the staff at Comstock has successfully blurred the line between creativity and basic engineering. Likewise, the recent addition of a 3D printer to the school's already impressive arsenal



of technologies allows students to connect the dots between art and math by imagining, coding, and printing miniature 3D versions of land masses and skyscrapers.

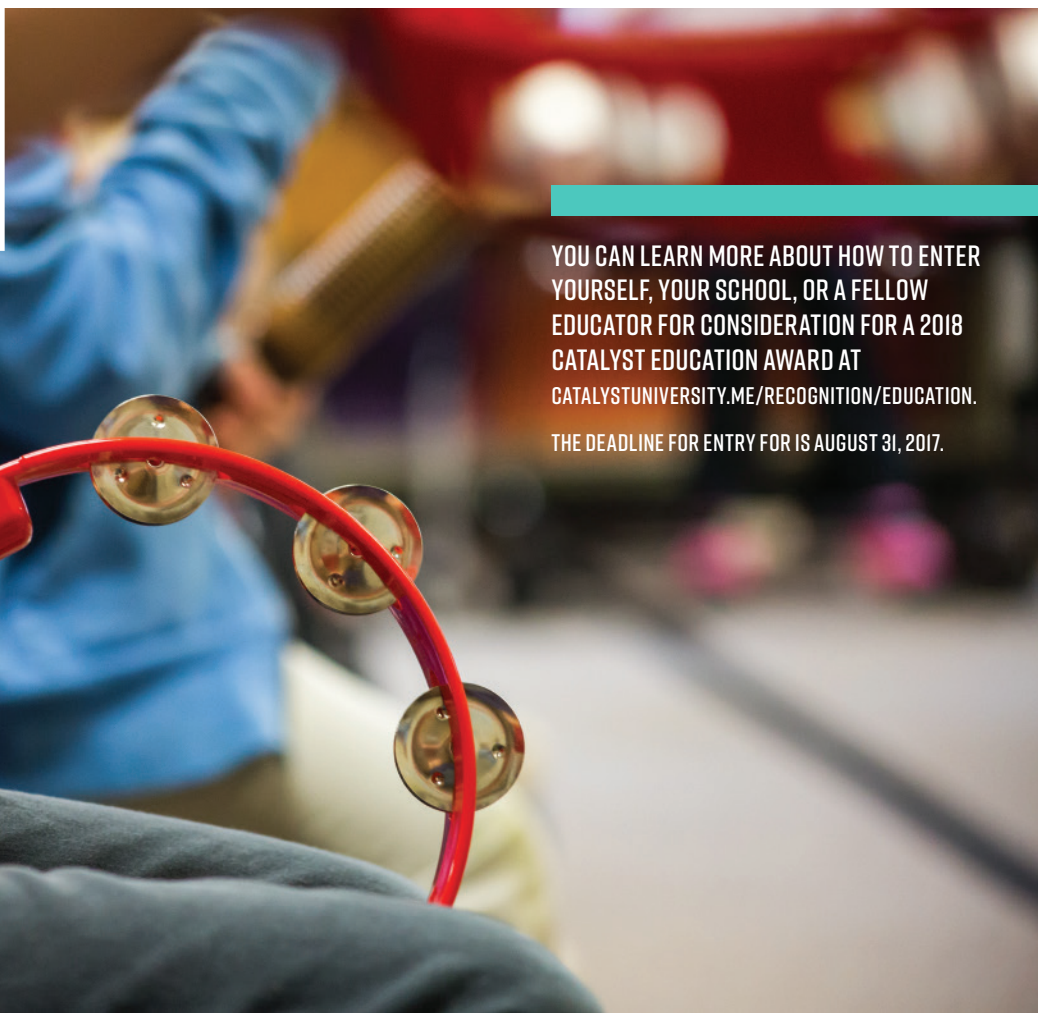
With so many awe-inspiring mechanisms on the premises, Comstock STEM has seemingly adopted the mantra of Uncle Ben, from Marvel

Comics' Spider-Man stories: "With great power comes great responsibility." While it is a public school, Comstock STEM Academy does ask its students to apply before being admitted.

"We want to be sure that each child has a drive to learn," Chopp said when asked about the admissions process.

After submitting their test scores, filling out the Comstock STEM application, and sitting down for an interview with Director Chopp, students who apply are considered for admission. Those who exhibit a genuine interest in an accelerated academic atmosphere, as well as a desire to be challenged by it, are given the opportunity to attend Comstock STEM.

In truth, Comstock STEM's advanced curriculum is but a fraction of what makes this establishment worthy of its Catalyst Education Award. Like its four companion honorees, Comstock STEM puts major emphasis on each student's personal progression, which extends past the walls of each institution and the subjects taught at them, and encompasses the greater makeup of their character. By investing every fiber of their beings into the students who roam their halls, this year's award winners have taken it upon themselves to begin a major shift in the mood of educators by promoting the belief that students must be taught to value and explore any areas of study that interest them, while being supported at home by parents and guardians who let them be comfortable with who they are.



**YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TO ENTER YOURSELF, YOUR SCHOOL, OR A FELLOW EDUCATOR FOR CONSIDERATION FOR A 2018 CATALYST EDUCATION AWARD AT [CATALYSTUNIVERSITY.ME/RECOGNITION/EDUCATION](http://CATALYSTUNIVERSITY.ME/RECOGNITION/EDUCATION).**

**THE DEADLINE FOR ENTRY FOR IS AUGUST 31, 2017.**





# CATALYST EDUCATION AWARDS

The Catalyst Education Awards' mission is to make Southwest Michigan globally recognized for preparing people to thrive in education and employment.

Many say that teaching is a calling. And because we couldn't agree more, we proudly support the outstanding educators who have dedicated themselves to making a difference in our children's lives — a difference that positively impacts our community. In solidarity with these teachers, principals, and schools, we proudly support education efforts in Southwest Michigan. From classroom to community, we are working to create a strong Southwest Michigan.

---

## TEACHER AWARD

Recognizes K–12 teachers for their passion and commitment to their profession through innovation and creativity in the classroom, and professional growth and development.

## PRINCIPAL AWARD

Honors K–12 principals for their leadership in establishing a positive campus climate, in instructional innovation and management, and in communication and community relations.

## SCHOOL OF THE YEAR AWARD

Commends a K–12 school community for commitment to student achievement enhanced by innovative programs, parent and community involvement, and professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators.



Submit at  
[catalystuniversity.me/recognition/education](http://catalystuniversity.me/recognition/education)

 **CATALYST  
UNIVERSITY**

PRESENTED BY SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST

---

# JEREMIAH SMITH

CEO/OWNER/OPERATOR AT COIN EXPRESS

## DEFINE LEADERSHIP.

Vulnerability, honesty, transparency, planning, strategy ... with a bit of focus, and goals.

## WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS YOU MAKE AS A LEADER OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

One of the most important decisions I make is who I keep (on my team) from a culture standpoint. I have a very good team and I try to keep them protected, so when we introduce new people, I think it's very important for me to screen them properly.

## WHAT IS ONE CHARACTERISTIC THAT YOU BELIEVE EVERY LEADER SHOULD POSSESS?

Honesty. I think every good leader should possess the characteristic of being honest. It's the only way to success.

## IS THERE ONE BEHAVIOR OR TRAIT THAT YOU ARE SEEING DERAIL MORE LEADERS' CAREERS?

Showing favoritism. The moment your team sees favoritism exhibited toward another person more, jealousy and envy subconsciously develop that will destroy your team overnight.

## WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?

I like to make music. That's one of my big things, making music, and then I travel a little bit.

## WHAT'S YOUR "GO-TO" SPOT TO EAT LUNCH IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN?

Erbelli's Pizza. I love pizza, When I really want a good pizza, I either go there, or call for a pickup.

## IF YOU COULD GO TO DINNER WITH THREE PEOPLE, WHO WOULD THEY BE?

Mark Cuban. Bill Johnston. Sean Combs.

## WHAT ARE THREE THINGS THAT YOU CANNOT TRAVEL ON BUSINESS WITHOUT?

I can't travel without my suits and a nice pair of shoes for sure. My phone and my laptop. But, the secret sauce is my hair grease.

## WHO WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET?

Marcus Lemonis of CNBC's *The Profit*.

## HOW DO YOU GET YOUR MOST CREATIVE IDEAS?

At night, when I'm taking my shower before I go to sleep, the ideas roll in. I think it's because everything is so quiet.

## WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Change. When you stop to reflect upon the changes that you've made, it makes you want to keep going and keep pushing. That keeps me fired up! I grew up a little in poverty for a portion of my life and, to see where I started from to where I'm at now, that makes me want to just create more change. Not just for me, but for other people. Change is very inspiring.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE LEADERSHIP BOOK?

*Emotional Intelligence 2.0* by Travis Bradberry. The book showed me how to deal with emotions.

## HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR AND YOUR TEAM'S DAILY MOTIVATION?

I share my daily motivations with my team. And I give my workers one-on-one time.

## WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ENSURE YOUR CONTINUED GROWTH AS A LEADER?

I attend seminars, read a lot of books, and I talk to leaders around the community whom I view to be really good leaders. When I touch base with them,



it keeps me sharp. When I think I'm right, they give me a whole other lineup. They keep me honest.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING LEADERS TODAY?

A true leader doesn't relax very long. When you become too relaxed, the glue starts coming apart. If you have a deadline, or a goal to meet, everybody's counting on you to lead that race. I've known just from my personal leadership that workers tend to work just as hard as you, and if you show some hard ethic, they'll try to outwork you.

One of my policies is, at my business, "Nobody outworks the boss." It creates a little competition, good competition. When I jump in with my team and do some folds, they say, "Oh, he isn't afraid to get his hands dirty." It just helps fire everyone up. Big time!

## WHAT IS YOUR "LIFE QUOTE?"

"I am powerful and in control of myself and my life." It comes from the book *The 40 Laws of the Alpha Male*.

There's also one that I got one from my track coach years ago. I don't know where she got it from. I was on the line getting ready to run the 110-meter hurdles. She came up to me and said, "Hey! Repeat this: I believe in me and my abilities." How can we survive in this world if we don't believe in ourselves?



# STACEY HAMLIN

**PRESIDENT AND CEO AT CTS TELECOM**

## DEFINE LEADERSHIP.

Connecting people, and then being able to inspire them to make your vision come to life.

## WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS YOU MAKE AS A LEADER OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The most important thing that I can do as a leader here is making sure that I'm developing opportunities for people to advance in their careers. When people feel engaged and like there's a place for them to develop within a company, your company is going to be successful.

## WHAT IS ONE CHARACTERISTIC THAT YOU BELIEVE EVERY LEADER SHOULD POSSESS?

Empathy. You have to be able to look at your staff, business partners, and vendors, and feel like you can wear their shoes by understanding where they're coming from.

## IS THERE ONE BEHAVIOR OR TRAIT THAT YOU ARE SEEING DERAILED MORE LEADERS' CAREERS?

Letting ego take over. The ones who lead with their ego are the ones who are going to make mistakes, when it turns out that they weren't the smartest person in the room. Leaders who are great are the ones who understand that and are able to build a

great team around them that takes advantage of everyone's strengths and minimizes weaknesses, including their own.

## WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?

Anything outdoors. I love being outdoors. I have two young boys, 13 and 11, and they're very active. We're a close family. We play a lot together and I watch them play sports. That occupies a lot of my time.

## WHAT'S YOUR "GO-TO" SPOT TO EAT LUNCH IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN?

Food Dance.

## IF YOU COULD GO TO DINNER WITH THREE PEOPLE, WHO WOULD THEY BE?

Mark Zuckerberg, Leonardo DiCaprio, Gwen Stefani.

## WHAT ARE THREE THINGS THAT YOU CANNOT TRAVEL ON BUSINESS WITHOUT?

My workout shoes, my tennis shoes, and my iPad.

## WHO WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET?

Katy Perry is extremely talented and so creative. Every time I've seen her, like at the Super Bowl XLIX Halftime Show, I look at her and I think, "How is she always keeping things fresh and new?"

## HOW DO YOU GET YOUR MOST CREATIVE IDEAS?

When I'm running!

## WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Nature. It ties in with running. Whenever I go somewhere, I like to find a place to run. It inspires me when I see light in the morning, during a sunset, or in the trees and woods.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE LEADERSHIP BOOK?

*Start with Why* by Simon Sinek. It is a book that did a nice job of explaining why companies need to know who they are, and why they're doing what they're doing.

## HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR AND YOUR TEAM'S DAILY MOTIVATION?

Communication. Communicate to everybody all the time. You can't overcommunicate. I think that makes your team feel like they know what's going on all the time. Then, there are no surprises.

## WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ENSURE YOUR CONTINUED GROWTH AS A LEADER?

You have to constantly take care to stay on top of things, create change, and go with the change.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING LEADERS TODAY?

The generational gap is a big challenge because there are a lot of businesses today that have three to four generations that work inside their doors. I know our company has three, and a lot of them are baby boomers.

I realize, that as a leader, you have to lead differently to the different generations. As the workforce shifts towards being made increasingly up of millennials, leaders need to understand that they have to be cognizant of what generation a person represents, because they look at leadership differently.

## WHAT IS YOUR "LIFE QUOTE"?

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained." It's really important to not be afraid to take chances and calculated risks. If you don't try, you're not going to get anything from it!

TO READ THE FULL INTERVIEWS, [GO TO 269MAG.COM](http://GO TO 269MAG.COM)

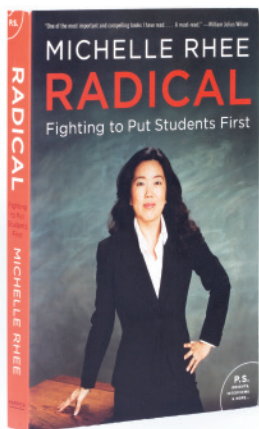
# the Life List

A collection of what's great in literature, film, and culture this month in (269).



“THE FATE OF EMPIRES DEPENDS ON THE EDUCATION OF YOUTH.”

ARISTOTLE

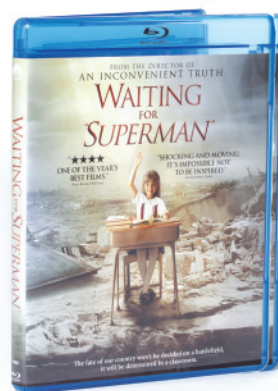


269 BOOK CLUB

## Radical:

FIGHTING TO PUT STUDENTS FIRST  
BY MICHELLE RHEE

Michelle Rhee's life story sets the state for her advocacy of education reform.



FILM + ARTS

## Waiting for 'Superman'

RATED PG | 2010

This film from director Davis Guggenheim explores honest education reform in our nation's public schools.

# Makers' MART

The region's exciting entrepreneurial competition is on! These four small businesses are the finalists in Makers' Mart, an annual competition to highlight creators in Southwest Michigan. The winner will be announced on January 26, 2017, live at Catalyst University, presented by Southwest Michigan First. Learn more at [catalystuniversity.me/recognition](http://catalystuniversity.me/recognition).

## The Green Glove Dryer

PORTAGE, MI  
[THEGREENGLOVEDRYER.COM](http://THEGREENGLOVEDRYER.COM)

KAREN SMOOTS | FOUNDER ▶



## Kalamazoo Candle Company

KALAMAZOO, MI  
[KALAMAZOOCANDLE.COM](http://KALAMAZOOCANDLE.COM)



ADAM MCFARLIN | FOUNDER ▼

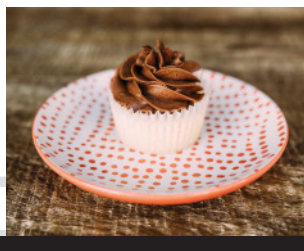


JULIE FOX | FOUNDER ▶



## Free Love Bakery

PORTAGE, MI  
[FREELOVEBAKERY.COM](http://FREELOVEBAKERY.COM)



CHRISTINE WEBER | FOUNDER ▶



## Hilltop Designs

MARTIN, MI  
[HILLTOPDESIGNSHD.COM](http://HILLTOPDESIGNSHD.COM)





## Ken Miller

CEO AND PRINCIPAL PARTNER OF THE MILLENNIUM RESTAURANT GROUP  
 STORY HEATHER BAKER PHOTO MITCHELL CONRAD

**1947 / BORN IN FROG HOLLOW AT THE FOOT OF BUNDY HILL IN THE IRISH HILLS DOWN AT SOMERSET CENTER, MICHIGAN**

**1950 / MOVED TO ALBION, MICHIGAN**

My passion and energy for business goes back to my father, who was in basic production for Corning Glass. He taught

me: “You show up on time, put in a full day’s worth of work, and be nice. Things will work out for you.” But the most important thing my father taught me was to be prepared: “You are as good as any man, but better than none. Get out of your lane sometimes. Get in a faster lane. If you want something else, get out of your lane, but be prepared!”

“

**I sold computers that would fill the size of a room. Now you can do everything from the iPhones® on your desk.”**

**1965 / GRADUATED FROM WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY (WMU) WITH A BACHELOR’S DEGREE IN MARKETING AND ECONOMICS**

**1970 / GRADUATED FROM WMU WITH A MASTER’S DEGREE IN MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE**

**1974 / SOLD COMPUTERS FOR UNISYS, FORMERLY BURROUGHS CORPORATION**

I sold computers that would fill the size of a room. Now you can do everything from the iPhones on your desk.

**1977 / EARNED A JURIS DOCTORATE FROM WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY COOLEY LAW SCHOOL**

When I started to practice law, I always knew that I wanted to serve two masters. So when I practiced law, I focused on the business, which opened the doors for some investments.

**1977 / FOUNDED BIOMET, A MEDICAL DEVICE MANUFACTURER LOCATED IN WARSAW, INDIANA**

It was always interesting to me that two guys from Kalamazoo (my brother and I) would be actively involved in a medical device company in Warsaw. Because of competition, I became close with many people from Stryker Corporation, as we were in the same industry, and at the same conferences and events. In 2008, it was acquired by an investment group led by Goldman Sachs that has since resold to Zimmer.

**1985 / CO-FOUNDED RADIO ASSOCIATES GROUP WITH BROADCAST PROPERTIES IN MICHIGAN, CALIFORNIA, AND NEVADA**

The series of investments included WKZO 590 AM in Kalamazoo and B-93.7 FM in Grand Rapids. The industry changed and chased us out. It was either go big or go home. We decided to go home.

I thought, “Why don’t I live in California and travel to Michigan, as opposed to living in Michigan and traveling to California?” When you have to analyze that hard why you don’t want to live somewhere, you just don’t want to live there. I like living in Kalamazoo, so I stayed.

**1988 / INVESTED IN THE IDLER RIVERBOAT IN SOUTH HAVEN, MICHIGAN**

“At the time, I was single, hungry, and thirsty. The only way to get all those things resolved was to buy a bar. I invested with two others, eventually investing in the Black Swan and a series of others. I’ve stayed with restaurants because that’s where my passion is. The rest (of my activities) were just investments.”

**1990 / CO-FOUNDED AVTECH LABORATORIES, A PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS TESTING LABORATORY IN KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN**

**1997 / CO-FOUNDED TEAM INDUSTRIES, A MANUFACTURER OF EXPANDED POLYSTYRENE FOR COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION IN GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN AND WINCHESTER, VIRGINIA**

I am the proverbial jack of all trades, with just enough knowledge to survive the diversity of investments I’ve made.

**1997 / FOUNDED KEYSTONE COMMUNITY BANK OF KALAMAZOO**

Banking is similar to restaurants: Instead of food, you buy and sell money on margins.

here. There are 23 new restaurants that didn’t exist 15 years ago.

Too many people think of restaurants as hobbies. The Millennium Restaurant Group

“ **If I leave feeling that something is better now than when I found it, I have succeeded.** ”

**1999 / FOUNDED THE MILLENNIUM RESTAURANT GROUP**

My partners and I formed the Millennium Restaurant Group in December 1999—that is where we got the term ‘Millennium.’ There were a lot of skeptics when we opened the Epic Bistro in downtown Kalamazoo. All of a sudden, things started happening in downtown Kalamazoo because of Bill Johnston, Tom Huff, and Josh Weiner. Last year was our 16th year downtown; we had a record year at the Epic Bistro and The Union. That’s a testament to the rising tide

is a professional restaurant company for professional restaurateurs. To me, leadership is about influence rather than authority. I’d rather influence my people with my habits. I instill in my group of 40 managers that this is their profession with a designated career path. Our guiding principles are: “Be caring. Be proud. Be professional.”

**2017 / LOOKING AHEAD**

If I leave feeling that something is better now than when I found it, I have succeeded.

“ **To me, leadership is about influence rather than authority. I’d rather influence my people with my habits. Our guiding principals are ‘Be caring. Be proud. Be professional.’** ”

**ON MILLENNIUM RESTAURANT GROUP...**

We are in the process of expanding to other locations in 2017. It is a competitive time in the restaurant industry, as we are all competing for workforce. We will add 200 new jobs this year.

**ON WMU...**

(Serving as Chair of the WMU Board of Trustees) As we look for the next president, we have different needs than in the past. This university is not the university it was 10 years ago. The inner threads of the community and university are much tighter now than they ever were, thanks to President John Dunn, economics, and culture. John (Dunn) has gotten us out of our lane and we’re on a very fast track.

**ON KALAMAZOO...**

When you have a passion for something, you find the time to get involved. The heart of our downtown is my passion. The Urban Growth Initiative, a partnership with the W.E. Upjohn Institute, is something that I’m involved with. One of my concerns is: “What has gotten us here, might not get us there.”

All the local anchors, like Bronson, WMU, and Kalamazoo Valley Community College, are what have gotten us here, but we need others to keep the momentum going. My passion is the urban core. It doesn’t matter how strong the muscles are if the heart isn’t strong. That work will help us determine what’s next for downtown.



## Simple Food. Big Flavors.

THAT'S BOLD! BY HEATHER BAKER | PHOTO BY MITCHELL CONRAD

**SHANE SHELDON PROCEEDS BOLDLY WHEN MAKING FOOD PAIRINGS** at BOLD Restaurant & Catering in Kalamazoo (Texas Corners). Boldness comes naturally to Sheldon, who became a successful restaurateur by executing one bold move after another.

Many who knew Sheldon in his youth probably would have bet then that he would end up as a professional athlete in his later years. After graduating from Portage Central High School, Sheldon played baseball and football at Hillsdale College for one year, then packed up his glove and headed to Florida, where he played

baseball at junior college. Soon thereafter, he was drafted by the Milwaukee Brewers and pitched three years in the minor leagues. An untimely injury sent Sheldon home, where he thought bartending might be fun for a while.

Sheldon began as a day bartender at Bravo! Restaurant and Café in Portage. It was there that he fell in love with what goes on in a restaurant. Sheldon recalls: “Shawn and Terry Hagen were great mentors. At the time, it probably bothered a lot of the staff that I asked too many questions. Not only did I bartend there, but I also hosted, bused, catered, and managed a bit. I never

“

**Growing up, my mom and dad hated it because I would make huge messes in the kitchen putting food together.”**

actually cooked, but I did get to cook some dinners with some guys in the kitchen... outside of the restaurant.”

Sheldon next enjoyed general manager roles at the Moors Grille Room, and then the Beacon Club. Coming off his tenure at the latter, he found himself suddenly presented with an opportunity in 2009 to open up a restaurant in a space about to become vacant. Having saved menu ideas over a 10-year period, Sheldon was more than ready to take on his own establishment. He says: “I pulled the trigger and within a matter of weeks, my team helped put the whole BOLD concept together: Simple food. Big flavors.”

Unlike those who watched Sheldon on the field from afar in his early years, those close to him knew that he always loved to cook. “I’ve never been classically trained in



anything,” he acknowledges. “Growing up, my mom and dad hated it because I would make huge messes in the kitchen putting food together. Most of my recipes and most of the things I do are, as we say, very simple but have very bold flavors—very big flavors. Bold is a simple word; we do simple food.”

Sheldon began BOLD with his own vision, but knew he quickly needed a team: “I was always a team sport guy. Even when it comes to playing golf, I love scrambles more than I like playing my own ball. I’ve had a lot of good leaders in the restaurants and a lot of great coaches. From all of them, I picked up some important concepts around vision: When you have a vision, you can’t be afraid to stick to your guns, even if it is going to upset some members of the team. And, it’s always important to credit those who stick by your side.”

Most of the team still with Sheldon today started the BOLD concept with him. He recounts: “They even helped paint the place. They got to see the menu as it was being developed. They even got to taste all the food, which we still do on a daily basis.”



**RECIPE**  
**AGAVE**  
**CHIPOTLE**  
**GLAZE**

**1 CUP AGAVE**  
**NECTAR**

**1/4 CUP DIJON**  
**MUSTARD**

**1 CHIPOTLE**  
**PEPPER W/**  
**ADOBO SAUCE**

**1 TSP ARIZONA**  
**GUNSLINGER**  
**(OR YOUR FAVORITE**  
**HOT SAUCE)**

*Blend all ingredients in a blender until smooth. Brush it on grilled fish, chicken, burgers, or steak.*

*Great tossed with roasted cauliflower or brussels sprouts.*

Sheldon quickly credits Executive Chef Andy Havey with helping him take his vision and team to the next level: “When I hired Andy Havey as a cook, I liked some of his recipes better right away. Within two days of his arrival here, I moved him to executive chef. Andy now has his hands in everything we do. Quincy Botsford, our sous chef, and I love learning different things from him and with him. It’s fun here, with everybody challenging each other. Overall, we have found that most of the stuff we do is very simple but well received at events like the March of Dimes’ Signature Chefs Auction, Taste of Kalamazoo, and Ministry with Community’s Chefs Against Hunger.”

For those coming to BOLD for the first time, Sheldon struggles to make a suggestion: “That’s like asking me to pick my favorite kid. To be honest, on your first visit, go with the features. Our menu doesn’t change very often, but every night there’s three or four different features. That’s basically the change of our menu. In any given six days, we offer 24 different menu items, from salads and soups to small plates and big plates.”



For those looking to spice things up at home, Sheldon offers a few tips: “Don’t be afraid of flavor; don’t be afraid of seasonings; don’t be afraid of a little spice. But, you don’t have to light people up. Don’t be afraid of roasting different things, smoking different things, and grilling different things to bring out different flavors in whatever products you’re cooking—whether it is vegetables, steaks, or seafood. Just don’t be afraid to try something. If it doesn’t work out, throw it away and try again.

“Bold doesn’t mean spicy, just bold means being bold.”





Settle down with a warm cup o' joe and a hot topic. Enjoy quality conversations featuring an industry leader!

# Coffee

---

with a Leader

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JOIN TODAY. Reserved for Southwest Michigan First Chamber and Council of 100 Investors.  
[catalystuniversity.me/programs](http://catalystuniversity.me/programs)



## Where the New Jobs Are

AS REPORTED BY THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS OF BATTLE CREEK UNLIMITED, CORNERSTONE ALLIANCE, SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST, AND SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN ECONOMIC GROWTH ALLIANCE.

### FLEX-N-GATE

EMMETT TOWNSHIP, MI  
CALHOUN COUNTY

[flex-n-gate.com](http://flex-n-gate.com)

NEW JOBS: **59**

### mophie

KALAMAZOO, MI  
KALAMAZOO COUNTY

[mophie.com](http://mophie.com)

NEW JOBS: **65**

### Sigma Machine

KALAMAZOO, MI  
KALAMAZOO COUNTY

[sigmamachine.net](http://sigmamachine.net)

NEW JOBS: **58**

### Tigmaster

BARODA, MI  
BERRIEN COUNTY

[tigmaster.com](http://tigmaster.com)

NEW JOBS: **59**

### Toefco Engineered

NILES, MI  
BERRIEN COUNTY

[toefco.com](http://toefco.com)

NEW JOBS: **10**

### Vickers Engineering

NEW TROY, MI  
BERRIEN COUNTY

[vickerseng.com](http://vickerseng.com)

NEW JOBS: **50**

### W E Slitt & Sheet Co.

THREE RIVERS, MI  
ST. JOSEPH COUNTY

[facebook.com/pages/W-E-Slitt-Sheet-Co](https://facebook.com/pages/W-E-Slitt-Sheet-Co)

NEW JOBS: **5**

Are you a growing business in Southwest Michigan? Let us know @269Mag / 269Mag.com.



## The Powerful Weapon

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

\$296 per pupil in the Berrien ISD.

### CONCLUSION: TONS OF HOMEWORK AHEAD TO IMPROVE MICHIGAN EDUCATION

While these disparities underscore the inequities in how Michigan funds its public schools, expansion of the GSRP program is an undeniable mark

of progress. As a result, many thousands more students statewide, and in Southwest Michigan, have a better chance at academic success as they proceed through the school system.

It is especially important because many of these students come from family backgrounds that research says may handicap their odds of success. While no miracle, GSRP is an important first step in leveling those odds.

Nonetheless, with Michigan relying on a quarter-century-old K–12 funding formula, and with academic achievement dropping precipitously in comparison to other states, many parents, employers, educators, and policy makers are restive for change.

Lou Glazer, co-founder of Michigan Future, Inc., a nonpartisan research organization, is convinced Michigan will falter in the decade ahead if it fails to produce more college-educated graduates to compete in a knowledge-based economy.

Glazer notes that Minnesota had a per capita income in 2012 of \$46,227. That's nearly \$9,000 more than Michigan. According to the U.S. Census, 31.5 percent of those age 25 and older in Minnesota had bachelor's degrees in 2009, compared with 24.6 in Michigan. The national average was 27.9 percent.

But the road to college will be arduous if students aren't ready to meet its academic demands. With more than half of students at more than a dozen Southwest Michigan high schools testing below college-ready in all four subjects of the ACT, there is reason for concern.

If Nelson Mandela was correct a generation ago, Michigan policy makers—as well as Southwest Michigan families, educators, and employers—have plenty of homework to do in the generation ahead to sharpen the “most powerful weapon” available to improve individual lives and paths to prosperity.



## Nicole Baker Fulgham

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

It surprises some people to learn that this level of specialization isn't already happening all the time, but it's actually not. We need to make sure teachers not only know how to teach and how to instruct, but also have the deeper knowledge needed to

really grow their own students' development and content knowledge. It especially matters in some elementary subjects. So many elementary teachers, and I was one of them, have only a basic knowledge of math skills. It puts our kids at a long-term disadvantage when teachers don't go deeper into their own studies of a subject that students need to understand.

These are just three ways to think about greater investments in our nation's students. Concrete changes to public policies at the national, state, and local levels will be required to see this happen. What's often lacking is the political will that makes

investments like these possible. That's why it's so important for people of faith to learn about these issues and to advocate.

**Nicole Baker Fulgham is the founder and president of *The Expectations Project*, found at [expectations.org](http://expectations.org). She is a former Teach For America vice president, policy analyst, and public school teacher. She is the author of *Educating All God's Children: What Christians Can & Should Do to Help Improve Low-income Public Schools*.**



## Von Washington Jr.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

Partnerships that bring together diverse stakeholders will promote a positive, community-wide impact and provide leadership in support of student achievement.

If business leaders prioritize these kinds of collaborative initiatives, they will realize ample return on their investment through the health and well-being of their community.

The Kalamazoo Promise is a rising tide that lifts all boats. More collaboration between business and education will ensure that all young people are on board.

**Von Washington Jr. serves as spokesperson for *The Kalamazoo Promise*, a college scholarship program and economic**

**development tool built around a common vision of building an education community in Kalamazoo, Michigan. During his prior tenure as principal of Kalamazoo Central High School from August 2007 to July 2012, he enjoyed a visit from President Barack Obama, who selected that school as the site of the first-ever presidential commencement speech at a high school for its winning entry in the 2010 Race to the Top Commencement Competition.**



## CORRECTION

IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE (NOV/DEC 2016), THE PHOTO TO THE LEFT WAS FEATURED IN "A MODEL FOR PROGRESS," A STORY HIGHLIGHTING THE WORK OF WHIRLPOOL CORPORATION IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN. THIS PHOTO IS OF THE WORKSPACE AT KINEXUS, A HUB OF CHANGE AGENTS THAT CONNECT PEOPLE, INVESTMENTS, AND ORGANIZATIONS WITH STRATEGIES AND SERVICES THAT MAKE THE REGION A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE, WORK, AND PLAY. KINEXUS' WORK HAS CONTRIBUTED TO WHIRLPOOL'S GROWTH IN BENTON HARBOR, MICHIGAN.

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269 MAGAZINE IS A REGIONAL PUBLICATION COVERING WHAT MAKES SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN UNIQUE.

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BY  
**RON KITCHENS**  
 PUBLISHER



# So, Why Are We Here?

MY ANSWER TO THE UNIVERSAL QUESTION

**T**HIS IS THE UNIVERSAL QUESTION ASKED in science fiction movies. It's one of the top viewer questions asked on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. It's one of those questions that you ask yourself during a bad office meeting. In this context, I am really asking why are we, the 11,000 recipients of copies of *269 MAGAZINE™*, metaphorically here reading together?

Why are we here? Because we need to get off our couches and do something! No, really. I mean actually do something. Not have an opinion. Not post 140-character tweets. Not text to vote. Not watch a Netflix documentary. I mean really get out of our chairs and off of our seats and do something to make our corner of the world exemplary.

*269 MAGAZINE* was created for one purpose: to create a culture of change in our region. We can only get better by honestly sharing data-driven facts demonstrating the need to create actions that will generate positive results for change in lives of the residents who live within and adjacent to the 269 area code.

This issue is the start of our second year of publication and is our most important thus far. In this issue, we focus on education and lifting up some pretty terrific educators for the first ever Catalyst Education Awards. I have had an opportunity to spend time with each of these recipients and have come away with such incredible optimism for our future. But optimism and a few incredible educators are not enough to create the region of the future.

I recently surveyed a large group I was speaking to and asked the participants to write down the three most influential people in their lives after their parents. Nearly 100 percent listed a teacher as one of their three life leaders. Think back on your own life: Which people really changed its direction? I bet there is a teacher involved. In my own life, there was Paul Skeans, my high school football coach, who sat me down and explained to me that I was not going to play in the NFL. He believed in me, but I just did not have the right gifts to go beyond college football. He revealed to me that my gift was leadership and that

I had an obligation to study and build on that gift. He gave me a book by Grant Teaff, which was the first leadership book I ever read. That book set me on a journey of growth that has led me to read hundreds of leadership books and teach around the world to lift up other leaders.

So, why should you care about education? The cliché answer is that you should “do it for the children,” but the reality is that I want you to do it for your own enlightened self-interest. Do it because you personally want to live in a great place. Do it because communities with educated, employed people have less crime, higher qualities of life, higher property values, more philanthropy, less government, fewer broken families. These types of communities are physically healthier and mentally happier, and create social and economic equality of opportunity for all.

What can you do to impact education in the future? Get involved, know who your school board members are, and hold them accountable to the highest possible standards of excellence, graduation rates, and

reading and math proficiency scores for all students. Make sure that they hire and retain the best teachers using the same practices that the best organizations use. We can no longer accept the status quo for educational outcomes; they will not provide us with the citizens or community we need to be competitive in Michigan, let alone globally.

Just like Paul Skeans told me, “I believe in you.” I know if the 11,000 of us reading this issue of *269 MAGAZINE* commit to work together, we can and will change the world.

**ALWAYS FORWARD,**

Enjoyed this article? Let us know! Tweet @269Magazine using the #269Mag with your thoughts.

it's  
time  
to

Thrive

01.25.18

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Employees deliver Thanksgiving meals and cheer to neighbors in need.

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