

TRANSCRIPT

HAMILTON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

#GreatThingsHappenHere



AWARD OF MERIT



The HCS Transcript Newsletter was recently awarded with a 2023 Award of Merit through the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)!

**3RD ANNUAL
HAWKEYE HOMETOWN
TAILGATE BRINGS
OUR COMMUNITY
TOGETHER!**



**JJ LOUDEN: FROM HHS
GRADUATE TO EMPLOYEE**



**LORI VANDUSSEN CALLS IT
A CAREER**

AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2023

HAMILTON CHEERLEADERS WELCOME HCS ELEMENTARY TEACHERS BACK TO THE CLASSROOM!

On August 22, the day before the start of the 2023-24 school year, all of the Hamilton Community Schools elementary staff attended early morning meetings together at Blue Star Elementary. However, as each of them walked up to the building, they were greeted with a big surprise. The Blue Star Elementary PTO and Hamilton Cheer team were there to cheer our educators back into the building! It was a great way to put a smile on their face just before the year kicked off.

"We thought it would be a great opportunity for us to be into the community because that is one of our goals for this season," said senior cheerleader, Jennifer Lambers.

The teachers passed through the tunnel of cheerleaders with big smiles, laughs, and even hugs for some of their former students.

“ This bonds us together, because in high school we get used to our high school teachers and forget about our elementary teachers and new teachers,” Lambers added. "This is good to bond us together and build our community."



MR. SZCZEROWSKI ADDRESSES HIS STUDENTS ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL: "FOR 185 DAYS, I AM YOURS."

Blue Star Elementary 4th grade teacher, Andrew Szczerowski is a favorite of most former students of his. Since 2002, Mr. S has been making an impact within Hamilton Community Schools.

On his 22nd first day in the district, he gave his class a welcoming message that set his expectations for his classroom, both for himself and his students.

"For 185 days, that's how long a school year is, I am yours. I will protect you, I will care about you, I care about your soul, how your family is doing, how much you're learning, how your friendships are going, I care about ALL of that," Mr. S told his class.

“ My metaphor is the blizzard/snowflake metaphor. My job is to create a blizzard of lessons and intelligence, all I do during my lessons is throw out a blizzard of ideas and thoughts that you have a chance to either grab and put in your snowball or let it hit the ground and melt. However, you cannot recreate that snowflake, meaning every lesson, every game, every opportunity in here is a chance for you to grab an experience or some bit of intelligence and put it in your snowball. It is my job to create the snow storm and blizzard, it's your job to grab the snowflakes and take advantage of it. You're not going to grab every one, some days you'll be grumpy, or you'll have a bad day, but you don't want to walk out of this room with wet feet every day. Wet feet are from the opportunities you lost because the snow melted."

The video has now been viewed over 100,000 times and shared by over 650 people on Facebook! Way to go, Mr. S!



Scan the QR code above for Mr. S's first day video!

BENTHEIM ELEMENTARY ECSE TEACHER LAURA MODRESKE WINS 'ONE SCHOOL AT A TIME' GRANT

By: Zach Harig

Laura Modreske has been in education for 37 years, the last six coming in Hamilton. Since her arrival, she has captured the hearts of so many young Hawkeyes in her Early Childhood Special Education program at Bentheim Elementary. On August 25, Modreske was rewarded for all of her hard work by winning the 'One School at a Time' \$1,000 grant from Family Fare, Spartan Nash, and WOODTV.

As you may remember, Mr. Bill Mousel won the first-ever award in June, so Modreske is the second Hawkeye in the first three months of the grant's history to be awarded it!

The grants are awarded based on the creativity, community impact, school impact, and execution of the school's grant proposal. As for her plans for the \$1,000, Modreske is going to put it to good use for her young Hawkeyes.

"This money is our starting point to develop our preschool playground, because all of our playground equipment here is designed for children five and up, and my children can't use it."

"I want them to be able to get out and explore nature a little bit more, be on the grass, climb, build, and do things they can't do in the setting we have now."

Bentheim Elementary principal Jared Randall accompanied Laura to accept the check and also took the time to explain what her presence means around the building.

"First and foremost, Laura is a fantastic human being," Randall smiled, "She's a unique blend of a farmer's work ethic and a person who has a deep, innate, passionate love for kids, especially kids who have unique needs. She really sets them up for success, no matter where they go after her classroom."

While bond dollars will soon be hard at work revamping the Bentheim Elementary playground, the grant money will certainly help get a jump start on her preschool playground equipment as well. Congratulations to Laura, and thank you for all of your hard work!



EMBRACING THE COMMUNITY IN HAMILTON 'COMMUNITY' SCHOOLS

Hello everyone,

I hope this Transcript finds you well and enjoying the great weather we have been experiencing this time of year. Fall is my favorite season of the year with the weather cooling off, numerous sporting events to watch/attend, community events like the Hometown Tailgate and Homecoming, and the normal routine of school has set in for parents and students alike. Be sure to find some time to take in all the wonderful things around you to make this Fall season a memorable one for you and your family.

With October at the top of the calendar, it caused me to wonder where the time went already. It did not seem that long ago HCS was gearing up for the start of school and now we are past the Tailgate, Homecoming, and gearing up for Fall festivals. It is true that time flies when you are having fun! Yet with the days going by fast, it has been a great month in Hamilton. Seeing the smiling faces of students and staff back in the buildings enjoying the time together and making gains in and out of school is another example of what truly makes HCS special.

Along the same line of what makes HCS special are the events which our community embraces, supports, and helps make awesome for our students, staff, and community members. If you missed any of the events toward the end of September and early October, I would encourage you to make a point of attending them going forward. The Hometown Tailgate, Homecoming, and Victory Day are all events which are bigger than the venue or sport they encompass, but rather are celebrations of what makes Hamilton special and separates us from the others: community! The coming together of students, staff, and stakeholders to celebrate our community in a multitude of ways is the cornerstone of what makes HCS special.

A special thank you is in order to a number of companies, organizations, and churches for their support since the start of the school year. If you were not aware, (and will see in this Transcript newsletter) there was a group of churches which supplied lunch to the HCS staff on September 15th for our Professional Development day. Not having to worry about lunch on a PD is a special treat in itself, but then to have a nice lunch provided is even better. To add to that show of support, we had a record setting number of companies and organizations contribute to the Hawkeye Hometown series this year. All of those contributions go toward supporting 4 events each year (Tailgate, Victory Day, ABC night, and the 5k run) for the community. Thank you to everyone associated with providing these two great gifts to the school district.

A couple of important notes for the district:

- While breakfast and lunch are provided for free to all HCS students for the 2023-2024 school year, it is still very important to complete the Free/Reduced lunch application form. The form is not simply for meals in the district, other benefits include reduced fees for AP test registration, Chromebook insurance, sports participation, college applications, along with helping with school funding. Information for the form can be found at: District website > For Parents tab > Food Service and scroll down a little.
- If you have not been on the district website this school year, please take a minute to visit it as we have been working on making it easier to navigate. Our award winning website (we can officially say this now!!) has been altered after we have taken feedback from staff and parents in hopes of making the site easier to navigate for everyone.
- While the school year does not seem to be that far along, HCS continues to make progress in and out of the classroom for the staff and students. Curriculum alignment, benchmark setting, and bond work continues for staff in efforts of making HCS better each day. We will continue to update the Bond page on our website with the latest information for those who would like to keep up to date on the steps along the way. It is an exciting time for Hamilton and we want you to be informed as to the great things completed and planned along the way.

Enjoy this edition of our award winning Transcript (we can officially say this also!!), as it is packed full of the great things going on in Hamilton. Thank you again for trusting us with your students, supporting us each day, and helping make Hamilton a destination location for staff.

Take care, make it a great day, and as always #GoHawkeyes



Dr. Bradford Lusk
Proud Superintendent
Hamilton Community Schools



Upcoming Scoop with the Supt. Dates:

Join Dr. Lusk for great conversation, free coffee and light breakfast at one of our upcoming 'Scoop with the Supt.' community forums, all held at Hawk's Nest Restaurant (3420 M-40):

Thursday, October 19 | 9:00-10:00 AM

Thursday, November 2 | 9:00-10:00 AM

Thursday, November 16 | 9:00-10:00 AM

Thursday, December 7 | 9:00-10:00 AM

JUMANJI MATH MOTIVATES 7TH GRADE STUDENTS AT THE START THE SCHOOL YEAR!

HMS teacher Bill Mousel brings back a fun and engaging game on the second day of school!

Hamilton Middle School teacher Bill Mousel certainly knows how to capture his student's attention, even at the toughest times. In the beginning of the school year, when most teachers and students are still getting acclimated, Mr. Mousel is already getting his Hamilton Middle Schoolers focused.

On August 24 and 25, Mousel hosted his annual 'Jumanji Math' challenge for his students. Jumanji Math is, of course, based off of the game Jumanji and provides a fun and engaging way for his students to settle back in to the new school year while work on math and problem solving skills.

"We're starting our math year off with this because I want these kids to come in solving problems and feeling successful," Mousel explained. "I want them to think of math more than just calculating numbers that we'll never use again, I want them to have a great experience at the beginning of the year."

The students were put into random groups and competed against one another, including at a challenge table. It's a way for students to get back into working in a team with classmates and get themselves ready to solve problems all year long.



“I think this is a great starter, I hate to say everybody is on it but we have a huge majority of kids that are really motivated by this.”



Scan the QR code above to watch the Jumanji Math video!



Next time you see some fog coming from Hamilton Middle School, rest assured it is likely just Mr. Mousel or another great teacher motivating their students with something unique like this. Mousel says he's just thankful nobody pulled the fire alarm on him this year (like they did in 2022!).



WELCOME TO OUR NEW EDUCATORS!

We are thankful to have so many outstanding educators joining our district in the 2023-24 school year! They are:

- Alissa Sweeney - Social Worker - Hamilton Elementary
- Kaytlin Hildreth - Social Worker - Bentheim/Sandyview Elementary
- Jordyn DeNeff - Resource Room Teacher - Bentheim/Sandyview Elementary
- Kevin Annis - Teacher - Hamilton High School
- Abigail Holm (Bramlett) - Teacher - Hamilton High School
- Heather Garner - Teacher - Hamilton Middle School
- Linda Page - Teacher - Blue Star Elementary
- Anja Goolsby - Teacher - Hamilton Elementary
- James Grooters - Student Services Coordinator
- Brinley Nieuwenhuis - Teacher - Hamilton Middle School
- Andrea Boeve - Teacher - Blue Star Elementary
- Elizabeth Canaan - Teacher - Hamilton Virtual
- Amanda Persinger - Teacher - Hamilton Middle School
- Skyler Campbell - Teacher - Hamilton Middle School
- Preston Saycocie - Teacher - Hamilton Middle School
- Anna Cason - Elementary Positive Behavior Support Coordinator



2023-24 FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL PHOTOS!



View other first day of school photos on our Facebook post at the QR code above! 



'HAWKEYE KIDS' BEFORE & AFTER SCHOOL CHILDCARE PROGRAM HAS A GREAT START TO 2023-24

By: Andrea Kuzee & Morgan Koops

At the start of this school year, Hawkeye Kids kicked off the district's first ever before and after school program. With three locations (Hamilton Elementary, Bentheim, and Blue Star) Hawkeye Kids provides before and after care to elementary families across the district. Childcare is also provided on snow days, half days, days off school, and over the summer. Building an entire program from the ground up is no easy task, but with Morgan Koops as their coordinator, Hawkeye Kids took flight. From logistics to licensing, Morgan and her team were able to welcome kids into their before and after school program on the first day of school, August 23, 2023.

With over 50 families currently enrolled, Hawkeye Kids has quickly become a big hit. A parent with a child currently enrolled at Hawkeye Kids Bentheim location states: "My daughter loves going to Hawkeye Kids, she talks about how much fun she has with her friends, Miss. Mary and Miss. Cheyenne. Not only does she love to go, I love the flexibility it gives my family. No more crazy rush from work to school to pick her up at the end of the day, I get so much comfort from knowing that she is taken care of until I get there." Other parents have noted that they were able to add 10 hours to their work week, because they no longer have to leave early to beat the bus. Mary Buus, site supervisor at Bentheim, noted that parents have also talked about how they love having a program in place that provides consistency for children who no longer need to be shuffled between babysitters and grandparents before or after school.

The teams of site supervisors and support staff at each of Hawkeye Kid's 3 locations work daily to provide fun, educational experiences for the children in their care. Heather Curtis, site supervisor at Hamilton Elementary, talked recently about a new activity that has become popular with kids, support staff, and supervisors. "A tradition we have started at Hamilton Elementary is cricket hunting. It started with one child's interest in finding a cricket chirping in a hallway. It has grown to include most of our AM crew... We are so lucky to have kids that are interested in learning and going on adventures with us! We can not wait to watch the program grow and meet more students who will bring in new ideas and inspiration to our group!". Laura Bruursema, site supervisor at Hamilton Elementary, excitedly explained that a student at their site had taken in origami paper from home, where she had been practicing. "She taught a group of fellow Hawkeye Kids to make origami paper hearts and paper bunnies! We all had a great time passing the hearts out to those we were thinking of!"

Hawkeye Kids has been a wonderful addition to the district. Christine Martin, Curriculum Specialist and Site Supervisor states "Hawkeye Kids is off to a great start! It has been so rewarding to see students interact with others from across the building, all while playing outside, problem solving, and engaging in new activities and games." With just 3 months under their wings, we can't wait to see what heights Hawkeye Kids soars to next. Enrollment for the program is reopening to families in October, be on the lookout for more information!



FIRST DAY OF 2023-24 HAWKEYE PRESCHOOL!



FOURTH ANNUAL HAMILTON VICTORY DAY PROVIDES SMILES AND MEMORIES FOR ALL INVOLVED



The 4th Annual Hamilton Victory Day was a huge success on Saturday, September 30 at the Hamilton Football Stadium! A record number of Hamilton football players and cheerleaders offered their time to cheer, create a gameday atmosphere, and foster relationships with 16 amazing Victory Day participants!

“ The Hamilton community has really rallied around Victory Day,” said event organizer, Mackenzie Brewer. “Once you experience the event once the smiles and joy will bring you back for more! Hamilton should be so proud to have such accepting, compassionate, and selfless student athletes as well as for being a community that offers opportunities for students of all abilities to feel successful.”



Scan the QR Code to view the Tailgate video recap!

HAWKEYE HOMETOWN TAILGATE BRINGS THE HAMILTON COMMUNITY TOGETHER



The 3rd Annual Hawkeye Hometown Tailgate brought the Hamilton community together on Friday, September 22. Over 1,500 Hawkeyes of all ages attended at both Hamilton Middle School and Cultivate Community Church. The entirely free event featured food, street performers, a car/tractor show, a petting zoo, bounce houses, and much more. After the Tailgate, the Hamilton varsity football team beat Holland Christian, 44-38! A big thank you to our events sponsors, vendors, volunteers and all event staff!

HAMILTON ATHLETIC BOOSTERS CONTINUE TO RAISE FUNDS & SUPPORT FOR HAWKEYE ATHLETICS

The Hamilton Athletic Boosters have a long history of providing support for Hawkeye athletics, both at the high school and middle school levels. Lisa Mast is the concessions manager and responsible for finding volunteers to work at various athletic events throughout the school year.

The Athletic boosters is a group of parents that volunteer to support our athletes in middle school and high school, as much as possible to help purchase equipment that may be outside of the traditional budget. The Boosters ask for requests from teams and weigh the needs and benefits of each program and once establishing a budget, the funds are disbursed to cover the approved requests. The Hamilton Athletic Boosters are reliant on two fundraisers every year: their annual February banquet and concessions stands at athletic events.

Once a month, the boosters board comes together to discuss any needs that are set forth by Athletic Director, Eric Talsma and the coaches.

“We strive to achieve paying for as many requests as possible via a partial amount or a full amount,” Lisa Mast, concessions manager for the athletic boosters explained, “We just love on our community and our kids.”

Despite new faces to the boosters board and volunteers over the past two years, they have found major success in aiding Hawkeye athletics. Mast says they have raised a good amount of funds and have made a true impact around the district.

“We were able to catch up from the COVID pause on new uniforms. We try to keep a rotation every three to four years for every Varsity sports team,” Mast added, “We also purchased the new mascot outfit, endzone cameras and headsets for our football team, pitching machines for baseball and softball, and purchased volleyball sling nets for the volleyball teams. We also award scholarships to four senior athletes every year.

That may seem like a lot, but that’s not all. The Boosters have also purchased new basketball net attachments for Little Hawks Basketball and provided a stipend to the elementary physical education teachers to purchase new equipment at all four elementary schools. Still, they have their sights set on more!

“We are working on new scoreboards for both the soccer and football stadiums to update with new LED lights to make it brighter and easier to read during our earlier games,” said Mast.

A big thank you to all of our Athletic Booster board members:

Jaymie Schippa - President | Renee Breuker - Vice President | Lisa Mast - Concessions Manager

Dan Mast - Treasurer | Kristin Morrison - Secretary

If you would like to help out in any way, you can reach out via email: HCSathleticboosters@hamiltonschools.us



“The Hamilton Athletic Boosters are vital to the success of our athletic family with the support that they provide to our athletes, coaches, and community.”

~ Eric Talsma, Athletic Director

HCS INTRODUCES NEW DISC GOLF COURSE

Disc golf has been a growing sport for our Hamilton students for years now, especially at Hamilton Middle School where teacher Mr. Duane Bosma leads an after school club. This summer, Bosma took it upon himself to ensure his students had a permanent place to learn and get outside to play.

Bosma, along with our HCS maintenance staff and other teachers and friends worked throughout the summer to clear some paths and get baskets into the ground between Hamilton Middle School and the Hamilton Administration Building. The six hole course offers alternate tee boxes to offer a fun and entertaining twelve hole experience!

Get out and play! Use the QR Code to find our HCS Disc Golf map on UDisc and submit your score!



HAMILTON HIGH SCHOOL NAMED ONE OF NATION'S BEST BY U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT!



Congratulations to Hamilton High School on being named one of the best high schools in the state and nation by U.S. News & World Report! This ranking comes from objective data, including state assessments, advanced placement, reading proficiency, college readiness, and graduation rate! Way to go, HHS staff, students, and administration!

DR. LUSK HELPS 5TH GRADE STUDENTS WITH LOCKERS ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL!



It's never easy making the jump to the middle school. On the first day of school, students are typically panicking about finding classrooms, making friends, and worst of all -- remembering that locker combination! Good thing HCS Superintendent, Dr. Bradford Lusk was quick on the scene on the first day of school again this year to help these Hamilton Middle School 5th grade students open their lockers! Way to go, Dr. Lusk!

HCS RECEIVES STATE-WIDE RECOGNITION FOR COMMUNICATION

Hamilton Community Schools received state-wide recognition from the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) in communication and public relations during their 2023 Awards! HCS was awarded with the 'Award of Excellence' for outstanding achievement in Website Stories & Navigation for our district website: HamiltonSchools.us

Meanwhile, an 'Award of Merit' was given to HCS for both the bi-monthly district-wide Transcript newsletters and our Work Based Learning communication and website!



“I appreciated the layout of the news stories and the graphics and colors are pleasing to the eye. The news stories are good, quality content that take a lot of time to create, but people love.”

~Feedback from an anonymous judge on our HCS district website

THINGS TO KNOW FROM SRO JOE

With the beginning of the school year upon us, we have made several upgrades to both district and classroom safety and security. District wide training started in August and will continue through November for teachers and other staff members who are in our buildings on a daily basis on what to do in the case of an emergency. The training is not just for an active assailant, but for any type of emergency that may arise: weather related, fire, and/or an active assailant or suspicious person on school grounds. Teachers were given an overview Powerpoint on the Welcome Back to school day in August, dealing with active assailants and what to do in case such an event occurs in our community. As a reminder, if a school goes into lockdown it does not do so only for an active assailant situation. Rather, it can be for exterior situations such as law enforcement handling a situation going on near or around our buildings throughout the district. Our goal is to be PREPARED, NOT PARANOID for emergency situations that may arise in our district.

The building staff have and will be learning what to do in case of a lockdown in our schools for an active assailant in our building. The training deals with how to secure and fortify our classroom doors, how to get out of the classroom in an emergency when the door can not be used, and much more. These are skills which are not only for school, but skills which can be used in our daily lives at a mall, movie theater, or grocery store.

In addition to the security of the classroom, GO BUCKETS have been placed in every classroom and common areas of our school buildings. These buckets serve as a multi-purpose item and can be used in a number of different situations/emergencies that may arise while the kids of our district are under our watch. Along with this training and equipment, we have been hard at work reviewing and updating our district's EOP (Emergency Operations Plan), along with updates to EMG (Emergency Management Guides) for handling building level emergencies, and our new EPG (Emergency Response Guides) for the classroom level emergencies. These plans and guides have been under review and updated since the Spring of 2023, which were given out at the start of the school year. While we hope these items are ever needed, we do need to be prepared in the case of an emergency. Please know the safety of the students and staff in our school district and community are of the highest priority and we continue to improve and update our safety procedures consistently.

Deputy Joe Knapp | Hamilton Community Schools SRO | Allegan County Sheriff's Department



Scan the QR Code to access SRO Joe's webpage on the District Website!

PUTTING AN OUT-OF-COMMISSION SCHOOL BUS TO GOOD USE

Hamilton Community Schools School Resource Officer, Deputy Joe Knapp and Transportation Director Nicole Ciganik came together with Hamilton Fire & Rescue to plan a mock bus accident on Monday, July 31 at the HCS transportation building.

Reliable Road Service volunteered to come flip over an old out-of-commission school bus to help provide the opportunity for bus drivers and first responders to train for a possible emergency. All Hamilton Community Schools bus drivers were mandated to attend the special training along with most Hamilton firefighters.



"The bus is an old, retired bus that we had here at Transportation so I was asked if there's anything we could ever do anything with it and we came up with this training," said SRO Deputy Joe Knapp. "The fire department said it was an awesome experience and they gained knowledge on what they can and can't do to get someone out of the bus."

It's an important partnership that is a win-win for all parties involved.

"It was an awesome opportunity, thanks to Hamilton Schools for letting us do this. We talked about stabilization tactics, extrication techniques, we opened the bus from the roof side to get people out in a quick manner," said Mike Capel, assistant fire chief at Hamilton Fire Rescue.

Overisel Township, Salem Township, and Graafschap Township Fire Departments all came out later that week to get some training in as well. WZZM 13 also covered the event!

Thank you to our first responders!



Scan the QR Code to take a look at WZZM 13's video of the event with HCS & Hamilton Fire!

RETURN OF HHS SPANISH EXCHANGE PROGRAM PROVES TO BE A WIN-WIN FOR ALL STUDENTS

For over 40 years, the Hamilton community has welcomed students from a variety of countries via our exchange programs offered at the high school. Because of the hard work of teachers past, we were previously able to build connections with high schools in England, Germany, and Spain. This year, we have begun building a new relationship with a school in Granada, Spain, called Colegio Monaita. This fall 23 Hamilton High School students in either Spanish 4 or AP Spanish 5 classes, along with their families, each welcomed a different student from Monaita into their homes.

These 23 students were accompanied by two teachers from Monaita. One of those teachers, Rebecca Ayres, is the sister of Hamilton High School teacher, Mary Ayres. Over the past several years, the two of them have contemplated making this dream a reality, of building an exchange between their two schools. It truly was a dream come true for them both to be able to work together and provide this experience for both of their communities. Together they spent hours matching students with hosts and planning different activities so that the students could see and experience as much of the Hamilton community as possible.

To start their 3 weeks here in the US, the group spent 2 days in Chicago. There, they learned first hand about the city of Chicago by spending time on Navy Pier, floating down the Chicago River on the water taxis, and taking in the views from the SkyDeck atop the Willis Tower. They also enjoyed a true American diner experience at Ed Debevic's, ate too much Chicago style pizza, and used the time to get to know each other, going on adventures together in the city and making Starbucks runs multiple times daily.

For the remainder of the trip, the girls spent their time right here in Hamilton. Depending on the day you could find them presenting to the high school and middle school Spanish classes about some of the highlights of their Spanish culture, spending time in the 3rd grade classrooms at Blue Star Elementary, teaching them their numbers in Spanish, kids songs and crafts, and reading them bilingual books, and even becoming cheerleaders for a day, where each student donned a cheer uniform and followed the lead of our own cheerleaders, learning chants and jumps.

Both the Hamilton and Spanish girls spent some time off the HHS campus as well. For a morning, the girls took a walking tour of Hope College, culminating at the DeVos Field House where they got an insider's tour of the locker rooms, training facility and weight room. From there they raced around downtown Holland, participating in a photo scavenger hunt, posing with people in Hope gear, in front of an American flag, with a lighthouse, blueberries, and other staples of life here in West Michigan. To round out the day, the group spent time at Dutch Village, learning about our Dutch heritage and being kids at heart, riding the swings and cuddling the bunnies and chickens.

The groups also spent time zooming through the Lake Michigan dunes when the Saugatuck Dune Rides graciously opened their doors, and trucks to the kids even after their season had ended. The girls were also warmly welcomed at the Outdoor Discovery Center, where they learned about the indigenous cultures of West Michigan, awed at the birds of prey, and where some, but not all, bravely held praying mantis that they found on their hike around the property.

Even Though their 3 weeks here were packed with fun-filled activities, both the Spaniards and Americans would tell you that the best part of this exchange was simply their time spent together doing all American things. The time with family riding in the car, the time spent at cottages, camping, bonfires, football games, or at home watching movies and sharing a meal together. This new bond was more than evident at the Farewell Dinner in the high school cafeteria. Each Spaniard addressed the group, host families included, and gave their heartfelt thanks and shared teary-eyed stories of their favorite experience while here in their homes.

To say the Hamilton students are looking forward to their time in Spain this coming June would be an understatement. While there, they will get to experience the same hospitality that the Hamilton community has shown the Spanish students. They will grow their minds, their experiences, and their bonds that will truly last a lifetime.



Hamilton cheerleaders pose for a photo with the students from Granada, Spain after teaching them about American Cheerleading on August 24.



Students from Granada presented slideshows to our Hamilton High School Spanish students on August 29 to teach them different things about Spain!

28 YEARS INTO TEACHING AT HIS ALMA MATER, "OLD DOG" BLAINE LUGTEN CONTINUES TO THRIVE

Blaine Lugten didn't get the opportunity to teach at Hamilton High School right away out of college. Instead, the 1984 HHS graduate took a job at Fennville High School before the chance presented itself six years later.

"I actually interviewed here out of college but didn't get the job, so I went to Fennville to teach. Then, Bruce VanderWal came back and asked me if I would like to come back to Hamilton and I said, 'Sure, I'll give it a shot.'"

After an outstanding interview, Lugten was offered the job and says the decision wasn't an easy one, but he knew he belonged in Hamilton.


"I think it was all of the memories and friendships, you fall in love with the place," he explained. "I think our children here are amazing, our adults are fantastic, I think we work so well together. It doesn't mean we don't have hard times from time-to-time but we talk our way out of it, this is home."

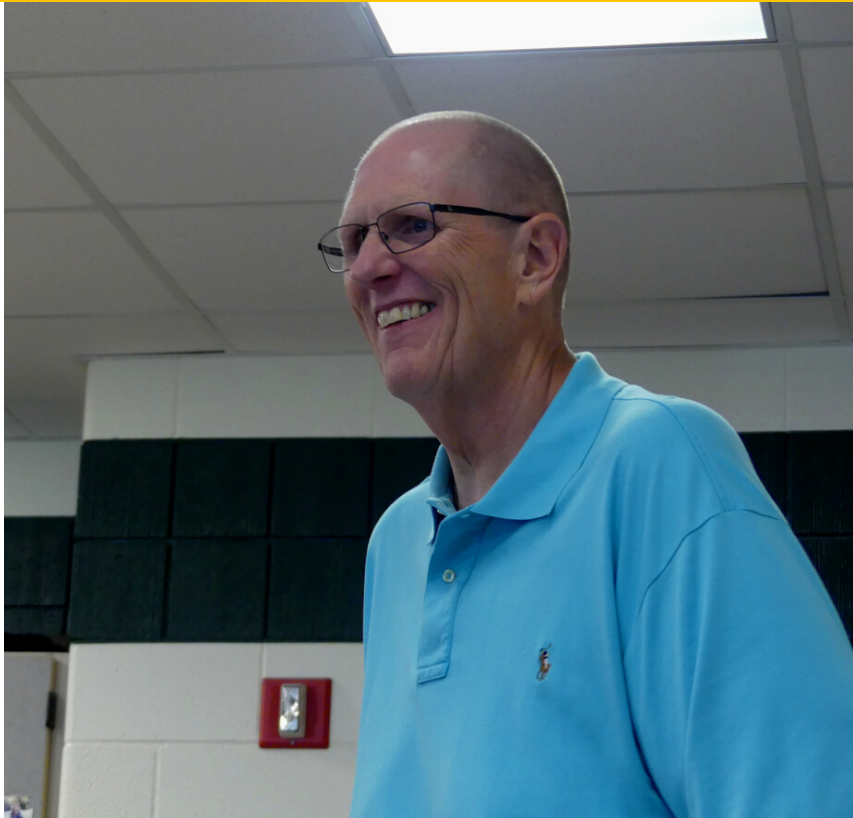
Fast forward 28 years since taking the job at Hamilton High School, Lugten continues to leave his impact on his students.

"I try to teach my students that they need to be uncomfortable and get out of that zone every once in a while because that's when you learn the most about who you are and what you're made of," Lugten added.

Even with 34 years of teaching under his belt, he says he's not quite ready to retire just yet and will be keeping his options open.

“They're not really forcing me out any time soon here I don't think and the students still enjoy an old dog and that's okay because I enjoy them immensely.”

Scan the QR Code to take a look at Blaine Lugten's video! 



LOCAL CHURCHES COME TOGETHER TO FEED HAMILTON TEACHERS AND STAFF DURING PD DAY

Thank you to our wonderful community churches who came together to help feed our Hamilton Community Schools staff during a full day of professional development and meetings on September 15!

- Hamilton High School: Grace Church & Haven Church
- Hamilton Middle School: Corner Bible Church
- Hamilton Elementary: Hamilton Reformed
- Blue Star Elementary: Graafschaap Church
- Bentheim Elementary: Bentheim Reformed
- Sandyview Elementary: Overisel Reformed
- Administration Building: East Saugatuck CRC



“THERE HAVE BEEN SO MANY BLESSINGS FOR ME HERE”; LORI VANDUSSEN DISCUSSES BITTERSWEET RETIREMENT

By: Zach Harig

Lori VanDussen has two different mugs that read 'Chaos Coordinator', and it's not just a clever saying, it's the truth. For the past ten years as the Hamilton Transportation Secretary and Dispatcher, she has helped handle bus routes, manage payroll, assist parent needs, communicate with staff, and everything in between. Behind every email, phone call, radio call to bus drivers, and sip of water, is a well thought out plan.

"I always have a plan B, C, and D ready for things that could happen," she explained, "Sometimes it can get chaotic trying to make sure everything is taken care of and all transportation needs are met."

Unfortunately for us at Hamilton Community Schools, Lori went into retirement on September 20, though it's hardly by choice. Instead, she says it's to honor promises that she made to friends and family who wanted to ensure she would enjoy retirement some day because without them, she would likely work the rest of her life.

"I have made promises, including one to a friend who is no longer with us," she said sadly, "I have to honor those promises."

Lori soaked up every last minute of working with some of her closest friends throughout the month of September.

“ I've built some great friendships here," she said with tears in her eyes. "I know it's a good move, I made some promises years ago that when the time came and I had my years in, that I would retire," she added.

Lori is a 1978 graduate of Hamilton High School and has two sons who are also Hawkeye graduates.

"So many blessings have come my way working here at the school, I never would have thought I would have worked for the school that I went to," she chuckled. "I've enjoyed every single minute of my employment here at Hamilton Community Schools. Everyone cares for each other here, on both good days, bad days, everyone is there for you, and you can trust them."

While it wasn't an easy decision to step away from a job she loves, she's ready to enjoy retirement with her husband on her farm.

"I'm going to hang out on the farm, that's the big goal of mine and spend more time with the grandkids, and the kids, I am looking forward to that."



Scan the QR Code to take a look at Lori's retirement video! 



2023 HAMILTON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE JJ LOUDEN FINDS A HOME WORKING AS AN HCS CUSTODIAN

By: Zach Harig

“You can tell he just loves being here.”

JJ Louden knew after high school graduation in May that he would have to find a job, he just didn't know exactly what or where. The 2023 Hamilton High School graduate served as a Hawkeye Helper inside of our district during the summer of 2022, where he assisted the maintenance and operations department with a variety of different tasks.

Louden says that experience taught him a lot of life skills and a variety of other things, such as how much he loves his school district and community.

“I like everything about Hamilton,” Louden smiled, “Everybody here is nice and there's always a nice person there for you every day.”

That experience as a Hawkeye Helper got Louden thinking that maybe he could come back to work for Hamilton Community Schools. After applying for a custodial job over the summer, custodial supervisor Lon Haverdink welcomed him with open arms and put him right to work at Hamilton Middle School.

At the start of the school year, Louden was moved to Hamilton Elementary where he was tasked with a morning shift of cleaning classrooms, hallways, trash, windows, and much more.

“I usually get here at 6:30 in the morning to get all of my rooms that I'm assigned to done,” Louden explained. “It's a lot of hard work, getting back and forth and making sure this building stays nice and clean.”

Anybody who knows JJ knows that he keeps a smile on his face while working every day and has made himself a perfect addition to the building around the students and staff.

“It's great to see JJ in the morning busy helping students and cleaning things up,” said Hamilton Elementary behavior paraprofessional, Brenda Moomey, “He always has a smile on his face, is always greeting students and staff, and you can just tell he loves being here.”

Just a few months after uncertainty about where to work, Louden says he has found a home in the same community that he has spent the past several years in.

“I really love this position, every day the staff is really nice and the kids like me, it just makes my day every day,” he smiled.



Scan the QR Code to take a look at JJ's interview video!



WORK FOR US!



Apply Now!

Hamilton Community Schools is Hiring!

Bus Drivers ● Custodians ● Food Service ● Paraprofessionals ● AND MUCH MORE!

Apply Today using the QR Code or at HamiltonSchools.us



TRANSCRIPT

HAMILTON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



Published bi-monthly by:

#EachWillThrive

HAMILTON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

4815 136th Avenue Hamilton, MI 49419

HAMILTONSCHOOLS.US

Non-Profit
US Postage
PAID
Grand Rapids, MI
Permit 1



****This is a district-wide mailer sent to all residents of the Hamilton Community Schools district. If you live outside of our district and feel you received this mailer by mistake, please email your name and address to Hamilton District Communications & Marketing Coordinator, Zach Harig: zharig@hamiltonschools.us**

HAMILTON 5TH GRADE STUDENTS HELP BRAINSTORM FUTURE ELEMENTARY PLAYGROUND RECONSTRUCTION

As part of the 2023 Hamilton Community Schools bond proposal that was passed in May, playground redesign at all four elementary schools will be on the docket! To help get the students involved in the process, our Work Based Learning coordinator Ashley Meyer and administration helped set up elementary playground visits for our 5th grade students.

On Wednesday, September 13, Mrs. Jodi Hansen and Ms. Brooke Statema's students went to Bentheim Elementary and Salem Township Park to brainstorm some ideas of what could be incorporated and created at Bentheim. Meanwhile, Mrs. Garner and Mrs. Miles 5th grade classes went to Blue Star Elementary and Kollen Park to help explore ideas!

"We're so excited and thankful that we passed our 2023 bond and very excited that we have our 5th graders here to give us their ideas," said Bentheim and Sandyview Elementary principal, Jared Randall. "These students will give us ideas for future playground equipment that is fun, safe, and uses taxpayer dollars to the best of our abilities."

The students talked to some of the current elementary students on the playground to see why they were playing on different equipment instead of others. Where the 5th graders would see lines or overused equipment, they would document it as well as what should be moved or removed completely.

"We found out that the kids don't use the open slides but they really like the tube slides," said 5th grader Raina Rietema.

Mrs. Hansen then watched her 5th graders visit the Salem Township Park in Burnips and enjoy the walking trail, something a lot of students documented could be possible at Bentheim with all of the open space.

"We have some ideas, some of our kids already took off to the trail over there and they enjoy that idea, some of them are already saying that we could do something like this at Bentheim," Hansen smiled.

5th grader Peyton Roelofs spent time discussing ideas with elementary students at Bentheim.

"The zipline at Bentheim could be a lot bigger, a lot of the kids said it was too small," she explained. "The students also want a bigger soccer goal and maybe a bigger football or baseball field," Roelofs added.

All of the students took notes during their afternoon field trip and will then split into groups and discuss their ideas. After weeks of working on their projects and creating presentations, the 5th graders will present to a board of HCS administrators who will then take these concepts into consideration for playground construction in the future.



"Any time we can get our own students involved to help with projects like this, it's a win-win for all involved."

Jared Randall
Bentheim Elementary Principal



Scan the QR Code to take a look at the 5th Grade Playground project!

