THE Kirtland CONNECTION

A Quarterly Newsletter for Kirtland Local Schools — *Winter 2026*

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Hello Kirtland Local Schools' Community,

As we head into the second semester of the school year, I am incredibly proud of everything we have achieved together. The growth our students have shown is a testament to the dedication of our talented staff, the partnership of our families, and the unwavering support of our community. Looking ahead, our strategic plan remains our roadmap; we are committed to delivering personalized learning, ensuring a safe environment, maintaining fiscal responsibility, and fostering an engaged community throughout the rest of the school year.

The first semester was filled with numerous awards and recognition for the district. Our district was rated five stars on our report card, and is in the top 7% (41st out of 607) of public districts in Ohio. The special education department received a perfect rating from the state. KES received the gold rating and KHS received a bronze rating for their PBIS program. KHS, KMS and KES have all been named *U.S. News* Best Schools.

Seeing our students succeed is wonderful, but what makes me most proud is how they got there. Our staff's focus on wellness and building strong connections has been a game-changer. Academic excellence isn't possible without first ensuring our students feel seen, heard and supported.

We look to continue the success by having a very positive and productive second half of the school year. For those in the community that would like to talk or hear about the schools, I have the third "Coffee and Conversations with the Superintendent" scheduled for March 26 at 8 a.m. at Honey'z. I hope to see many of you there.

Thank you for your continued support,
Dr. Chad VanArnhem, Superintendent

KIRTLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL COMBINED HOLIDAY CHEER WITH COMMUNITY SERVICE

Kirtland Middle School (KMS) students spread holiday joy while helping families in need. KMS partnered with Toys for Tots to collect new, unwrapped toys for local children of all ages this holiday season. A donation box was located in the Kirtland Middle School office and accepted contributions through December 12. The school community's generosity resulted in approximately 350 total toys, books, and games collected for local families.

"Last year, the overwhelming success of our penny wars for hurricane relief showed that our community is driven by a passion to help those in need," said KMS eighth-grade teacher Kelly Hedger. "The collective effort truly demonstrates the strength and generosity of the Kirtland community,"

In addition to the Toys for Tots collection, community members and families made cash donations, which were used to purchase additional toys for families throughout the area. Proceeds from the week's efforts also benefited the Kirtland Service Council, which assists families within the Kirtland community.

"We weren't sure what to expect in our first year partnering with Toys for Tots, but our Kirtland families and students went above and beyond to make this toy drive a tremendous success," said KMS eighth-grade teacher Mary Reilly. "Mr. Race is always so supportive of any initiative that involves giving back to the community, especially one we can get our students excited about."

During Holiday Spirit Week, students participated in themed dress-up days while supporting all holiday fundraising efforts. The week transformed charitable giving into a schoolwide celebration, encouraging students to bring donations while enjoying festive activities with their classmates.

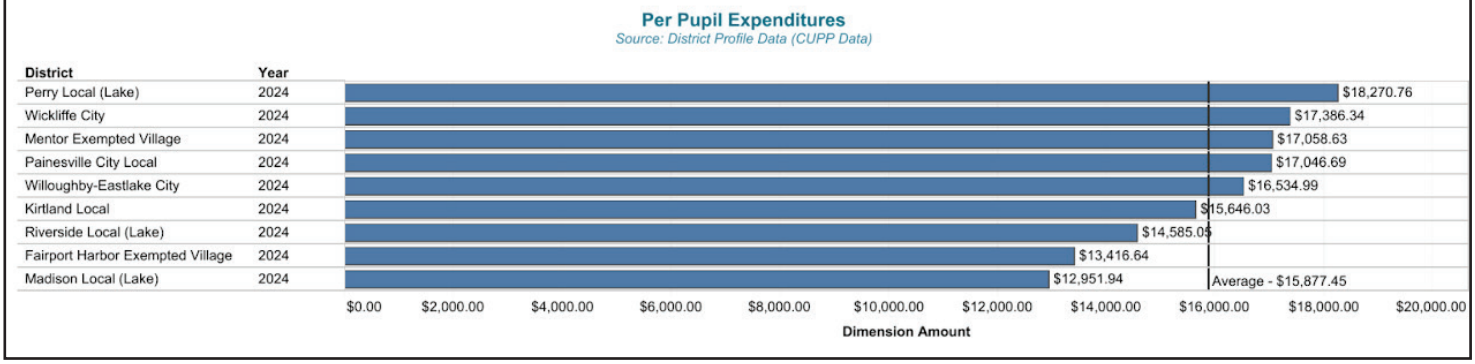
TREASURER'S UPDATE

The Kirtland Local Schools places a notably high share of its budget directly into instruction and student services compared with many peers, and that focus is a key part of the district's identity. This same commitment is paired with a relatively moderate tax effort when compared with other Lake County school systems.

Instructional investment in students

Kirtland directs a large portion of its operating dollars to classroom teaching, instructional support, and student-facing services, rather than to central administration or overhead. This shows up in strong per-pupil spending on teachers, academic programs, and supports that directly impact day-to-day learning.

When compared with other Lake County districts, Kirtland consistently ranks near the top in the share of spending that goes to instruction and student support. This means that for each tax dollar collected, a greater-than-average portion is invested where families see it most: in classrooms, teachers, and learning opportunities for students.



Comparison with other Lake County districts

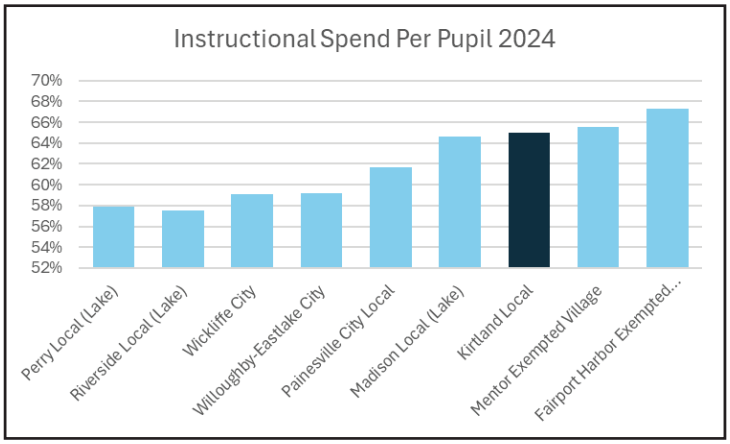
Across Lake County, districts must balance facility needs, support services, and mandated costs, but Kirtland's spending pattern leans more heavily toward teaching and learning. This allows the district to maintain small class sizes, strong academic offerings, and robust student services while still operating within a responsible financial framework.

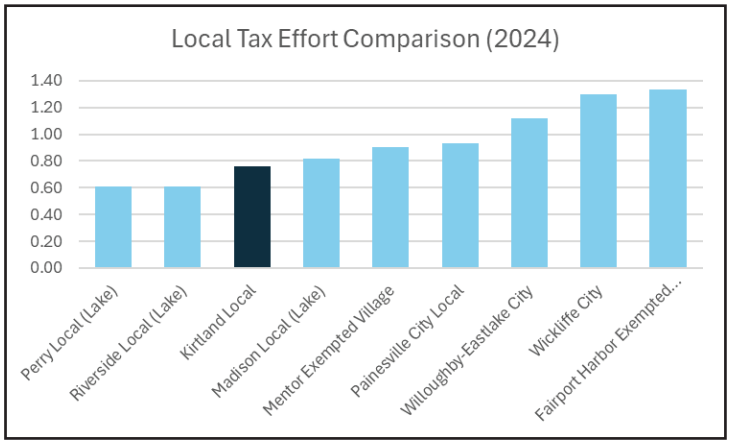
Families can be confident that the district's financial decisions are driven by what will most benefit students' educational experience rather than by expanding non-instructional overhead.

Local tax effort and value

On the tax side, Kirtland's residents support the schools at a level that is competitive with, but not out of line with, other Lake County communities. When considering both millage and property values, the overall tax effort required to sustain Kirtland's programs is generally in the mainstream of neighboring districts rather than at the extremes.

Because Kirtland channels such a high share of its budget into instruction, the community sees strong educational value for its tax investment. In practical terms, this means that local taxpayers are helping fund a district that converts their support into visible outcomes: strong classroom instruction, student programs, and learning supports that benefit Kirtland students every day.





KES STUDENTS BRING CREATIVITY TO LIFE AT HOLIDAY MAKERS' FAIRE

Kirtland Elementary School (KES) once again transformed its gymnasium into a bustling holiday marketplace as students showcased their creativity and strong work ethic during this year's Makers' Faire. The November 20 event brought colorful displays, student-run booths, and a festive atmosphere to campus thanks to a collaborative effort led by KES Principal Missy Godina and the Kirtland PTA.

"The creativity was incredible," Godina said. "Students took so much pride in their work, and it was fun to watch them develop their own products and marketing strategies. The excitement in the building was contagious."

Students from kindergarten through fifth grade set up shop with homemade goods, thoughtfully designed displays, and coordinated holiday outfits, turning the gym into a cheerful winter workshop. Families browsed the rows of booths, stopping to admire the variety of items and support the young entrepreneurs.

This year's Makers' Faire featured more than 75 student vendors and 54 booths offering items such as handmade ornaments, holiday crafts, buttons, bracelets, baked goods, personalized cards, festive drinks, jewelry, and other unique creations.

KES students also collaborated with Kirtland High School students from Kim Ruggeri's Business' class to develop strategic marketing plans aimed at maximizing the profitability of their merchandise.

Through the event, students strengthened real-world skills including product design, advertising, financial management, and customer service. Building on its growing success, KES plans to continue the Makers' Faire tradition and further expand opportunities for students to explore entrepreneurship and creative expression.

KIRTLAND ELEMENTARY EARNS SEVENTH CONSECUTIVE GOLD IN STATE PBIS RECOGNITION

For the seventh straight year, Kirtland Elementary School (KES) has been honored with the highest individual school distinction in Ohio's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program, earning the Gold Award once again for its ongoing commitment to fostering a positive and supportive school environment.

The Gold Award, presented by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce in partnership with the Ohio PBIS Network, recognizes schools that excel in implementing comprehensive behavioral support systems that strengthen academic, social, and emotional development.

"This award is a testament to the dedication of our staff, students, and families," said KES Principal Missy Godina. "PBIS is woven into everything we do at KES. It guides how we teach expectations, build relationships, and create a school culture where every child feels valued and capable of success."

KES received this year's Gold Award by demonstrating sustained excellence and continuous improvement in key PBIS practices, including:

- Clearly communicated behavioral expectations across the building
- Consistent positive reinforcement and recognition systems
- Data-informed planning to support student needs
- Targeted supports and interventions for students who require additional assistance
- School-wide acknowledgment and celebration of positive behavior

PBIS has been shown to strengthen school climate, increase student engagement, and reduce behavior concerns. At Kirtland Elementary, the framework continues to drive meaningful improvements in both student behavior and academic readiness, helping students feel connected and motivated.

Achieving Gold for seven consecutive years highlights the school's enduring commitment to a safe, welcoming, and student-centered learning environment. KES remains focused on building upon this success and continuing to model PBIS excellence within the district and across Ohio.

KIRTLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN ALLERGY AWARENESS TRAINING

Kirtland Middle School students received important, potentially life-saving instruction on November 18 during a visit from the Allison Rose Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to reducing deaths caused by food allergies in children and young adults.

Representatives from the Independence-based foundation met with students to teach the signs and symptoms of allergic reactions and how to respond quickly and efficiently in an emergency. The training included instruction on recognizing anaphylaxis and the proper use of epinephrine injectors (EpiPens).

The district maintains an inventory of EpiPens in each school building and has partnered with the Allison Rose Foundation since 2024 to ensure staff and students are prepared to act when minutes matter. Kirtland is one of many Northeast Ohio schools trained by the organization, which focuses on education, awareness, advocacy, and research surrounding food allergies.

The knowledge and information they learned at the assembly can be carried with them for years to come. "We now have 250 more educated students that could someday save a life because they had this training," said KMS Principal Bob Race.

Kirtland Local Schools continues to prioritize student health and safety through partnerships like this one, giving students the tools and confidence to respond in emergency situations.

KIRTLAND HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK EARNS NATIONAL GALLERY OF EXCELLENCE HONOR

The 2025 Kirtland High School yearbook has been selected for the Walsworth Gallery of Excellence, a national distinction awarded to only a small percentage of yearbooks printed by the company.

The publication, titled *In Retrospect,* commemorated Kirtland High School's 75th anniversary and was created entirely by students under the guidance of yearbook adviser Jennifer Berry.

From capturing photos and conducting interviews to designing layouts and editing pages, the student staff handled every aspect of production.

"Yearbook allows us to express ourselves freely, transforming individual ideas into a collaborative creation that will forever represent our class," said Megan Urbanick, senior and design editor for the 2026 yearbook. "Each page reflects our shared creativity, demonstrating our collective efforts."

Building on that sense of collaboration, Kaitlyn D'Amato, senior and editor-in-chief for the 2026 yearbook, who has been involved since her freshman year, said her experience working on the yearbook throughout high school has been invaluable.

"Having the ability to create Kirtland's yearbook has truly been a gift," said D'Amato. "Last year's book was a testament to the program Mrs. Berry has built and the commitment our yearbook team has to creating a time capsule of their time in high school. As this year's Editor-in-Chief, my hope is to create a yearbook that not only reflects our team's hard work, but also encapsulates the memories that I will forever hold as a student at Kirtland High School."

This is Kirtland's third time earning a place in the Gallery of Excellence during Berry's eight years as adviser. Berry said the award is a testament to the dedication of her staff, and last year's editor, Sylvia Vosicky ('25), for her hard work and leadership. She added that the yearbook's success is the result of the entire team's collective effort.

Gallery of Excellence yearbooks are showcased at workshops, conferences and in national classroom resources to inspire other student journalists across the country.

KIRTLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION RECOGNIZE OUTSTANDING AP SCHOLARS AND NATIONAL MERIT SEMIFINALIST

The Kirtland Board of Education honored the school's newest AP Scholars at its October 20 meeting. This recognition includes both current students and graduates from the Class of 2025, all of whom have demonstrated years of dedication, hard work, and a strong commitment to academic excellence that continues to make Kirtland High School (KHS) proud. Congratulations to:

AP Scholar: (Granted to students who receive scores of 3 or higher on three or more AP Exams): Vincent Carriero, Chloe Hansen, Kennedy Knaak, Walter Knoop, Skylar Leavelle, Isabel Mueller, Johnny Rascan, Emily Ridgeway, Kelsey Sayle, Sophia Shepard, Sophia Skrbis, Sofia Sverko, Isabelle Copeland, Jared Cottrell, Elliot Hostelley, Andrew Kostelnik, Corbin MacGillis, Richard Pennza, Niko Vasquez, Charlie Vignero, Howard Ayers, and Brandon Oppenheim.

AP Scholar with Honor: (Granted to students who receive an average score of at least 3.25 on all AP Exams taken, and scores of 3 or higher on four or more of these exams): Danny Alfieri, Elise Beinhardt, Jeremy Mrva, Hannah Stroberg, Katelyn Beuck, Faith Blankenship, Eric Bradac, Ryan Caimi, Kaitlyn D'Amato, Michael Dumstorff, Priscilla Pennza, Megan Urbanick, Vivienne Venida, and Emily Zivko.

AP Scholar with Distinction: (Granted to students who receive an average score of at least 3.5 on all AP Exams taken, and scores of 3 or higher on five or more of these exams): William Burt, Vittoro Cantini, Maksimilyan Clipov, Knox Crisci, Clare Davidson, Bo Garth Famularcano, Kiera Fortney, Sam Gordon, Harper Hammond, Susanne Hansen, Marin Haupt, Sean Kats, Vincent Loncar, Sean Lowery, Grace Mastrangelo, Maxwell Paul, Maddox Perez, Kyle Pilarczzyk, Ivana Rodin, Niko Samac, Sylvia Vosicky, Matilda Jankowski, Jacob LaVerde, Lauren Palagyi, Hudson Weight, and Charlie Whittaker.

"Congratulations to all of our outstanding AP Scholars on achieving this incredible accomplishment through all of their hard work, commitment to learning, and perseverance, challenging themselves with multiple AP classes in addition to balancing their many athletic and extracurricular commitments," said KHS Principal Mary Pat Pavicic. "I would also like congratulate our dedicated AP teachers, several of whom teaching multiple AP courses, for providing high quality learning opportunities for our students that not only allow our students college credit earning potential, but enable them exposure to rigorous, college-level curriculum through which they develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that set them up for success and limitless opportunities in their academic futures."

KHS student Charlie Whittaker was also recognized for earning distinction as a 2026 National Merit Scholarship Competition Semifinalist. Semifinalists are the highest scorers in each of the 50 states and represent less than one percent of each state's high school seniors.

KIRTLAND HIGH SCHOOL CELEBRATES GRAND OPENING OF THE BUZZ STOP SPIRIT STORE

Kirtland High School (KHS) celebrated the official grand opening of The Buzz Stop, the school's new student-run spirit store, on November 19. The store is the main project of KHS's new year-long entrepreneurship course, which gives students hands-on experience running a business from the ground up.

During the grand opening, students were invited to tour the space during first and second homebases. They were able to browse merchandise and place orders by cash and card. Guests were also treated to snacks to mark the exciting occasion.

The Buzz Stop currently offers a variety of Kirtland-themed apparel, including T-shirts, hoodies, crewnecks and sweatpants. The spirit store's grand opening reflects months of work by the students in Kim Ruggeri's entrepreneurship class.

"I'm very proud of the hard work and creativity the entrepreneurship students put into the products in the store and the grand opening," said Ruggeri. "The apparel items are all designed and produced by the students and the students will be running the store. The grand opening was an exciting way to introduce the store to all KHS students and the entrepreneurship students did a great job pulling it all together!"

They have been responsible for every aspect of getting the store up and running, from naming and branding to designing inventory, developing pricing, creating promotional materials, planning operations, and printing using the store equipment.

"It is atypical for students to have so much involvement in the design and decision-making of any project, let alone a store," Ruggeri said. "Seeing their ideas come to life has been incredibly rewarding."

The store will soon open to the larger community during KHS athletic events and other school activities. A website is also being developed and will be shared once it's complete.

The district would like to thank the Kirtland Education Foundation Academic Boosters, Kirtland Kiwanis and the Kirtland PTA for contributing generous donations to help get The Buzz Stop up and running for students and the community.

KIRTLAND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SHINE AT REGIONAL HONORS CHOIR FESTIVAL

Four Kirtland High School (KHS) choir students represented the district at the Ohio Music Education Association (OMEA) Districts 4 and 7 Honors Choir Festival at Cleveland State University (CSU) November 13-15, showcasing their vocal talents alongside peers from more than 30 Northeast Ohio schools.

Seniors Kate Beuck and Josh Stewart performed with the Mixed Honors Choir under the direction of Dr. Lisa Wong, while sophomores Kimmy Gruden and Grace Rahz sang in the Treble Honors Choir, directed by Dr. Brian Bailey. The three-day festival culminated in a performance at CSU's Waetjen Auditorium on November 15.

"My favorite part about the honors choir festival is the fact that even though no one knew each other, we formed bonds together almost immediately and I made so many new friends," said Beuck.

The honor choir festival provided Kirtland students with an immersive musical experience that extended beyond rehearsals and performance. Participants collaborated with talented vocalists from across the region, attended performances by CSU's University Chorus and Chorale, and dined in the campus' Viking Marketplace.

"This honors choir was my favorite yet," said Stewart. "It was an amazing performance and the group of people were very supportive and helpful!"

Selection for OMEA honors choirs is a competitive process that recognizes exceptional student musicians. Students must audition and demonstrate advanced vocal abilities to earn a spot in these ensembles. For many participants, the festival serves as both an educational opportunity and a preview of collegiate-level music programs.

The students' participation in the regional festival reflects the ongoing commitment to music education at KHS.

FALL SPORTS SHORTS

The fall sports season ended for the Kirtland Hornets on Dec. 5 when the football team claimed its eighth state championship at Tom Benson Hall-of-Fame Stadium in Canton. Here's a look back at how each of Kirtland's fall sports teams fared:

FOOTBALL

The Hornets clinched the Division VI state championship with a 41-6 win over Hopewell-Loudon. The win completed the sixth undefeated season under head coach Tiger LaVerde.

Leading the charge for the Hornets were 13 All-Ohioans. Jake LaVerde was named the Co-Offensive Player of the Year while John Silvestro, Lucci Cantini, Marko Valentic, Chace Gron, Ty Bledsoe, Zander Perko, Ryan Caimi, Jack Turk, Zach Freeburg, Cameron Treadwell, Sebastian Becker, and Andy Ridgeway also earned All-Ohio honors.

CROSS COUNTRY

Kirtland's girls' cross country team won its sixth straight Chagrin Valley Conference title and concluded its season at the state championships. Senior Izzie Copeland capped a stellar career with a seventh-place finish (18:43.89), earning first-team All-Ohio honors. She led the Hornets to a 10th-place team finish with 281 points.

Also scoring for Kirtland were Kylie Sayle (75th, 20:25.17), Nadija Mrva (93rd, 20:38.31), Anna Hill (109th, 20:55.08), Danika Schaum (146th, 21:38.89), Megan Urbanick (166th, 22:06.06), and Sarah Zivko (175th, 22:35.14). In the Division IV boys' race, Kirtland's Joey Ciavarelli finished 117th in 17:32.52, representing the Hornets.

BOYS SOCCER

Kirtland's boys' soccer team finished the season with a 9-7-3 record after a 1-0 loss to Rootstown in a district championship game.

Tage Crisci and Marko Valentic were both named first-team All-Chagrin Valley Conference, while senior Charlie Whitaker and sophomore Bram Crisci earned second-team honors. Seniors Eli Johnson and Xavier Lasecki were named honorable mention all-conference. Crisci also was recognized as an All-Ohioan after recording 89 saves.

GIRLS SOCCER

Kirtland's girls' soccer team finished the year 15-7 after a deep run into the postseason.

The Hornets went 4-1 in the postseason, with a 1-0 loss to Chippewa in the regional championship round. Junior Lexi Vosicky was named an All-Ohioan, and she also earned first-team All-CVC honors. Sophomore Peyton Adkins joined Vosicky on the first team.

Assistant coach Julie Madden was named the Assistant Coach of the Year in Division V.

VOLLEYBALL

Kirtland's volleyball team finished the season with a 17-8 record. Five Hornets earned all-conference honors, and all five are juniors who will return next season. Ellie Spencer and libero Bria Golem earned first-team honors, Andriana Grman was a second-team selection, and Karli DiFranco and Willa Gordon were named honorable mention.

BOYS GOLF

Kirtland's boys' golf team collected conference and sectional titles during the 2025 season. The Hornets kicked off the postseason by clinching the CVC Valley Division title, then edged Independence for the Division III Bunker Hill Sectional championship. Kirtland's season ended with a seventh-place finish at the Tannenhauf District tournament.

Senior Danny Shafer and juniors Sammy Ridgeway, Nick Nead, and Ryan Green each were named first-team all-conference while junior Maggie Kothera and sophomore Johnny Scalish earned honorable mention honors.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

February 9	Teacher Workday –NO SCHOOL
February 10	Fifth Grade Band Concert
February 13	KES Heart Healthy Day
February 16	Presidents' Day -NO SCHOOL
March 2	KES only –NO SCHOOL
March 6	End of Quarter 3
March 10	PTA Meeting
March 21	PTA Auction
March 30- April 6	Spring Break
April 10-11	OMEA MS/JH Solo & Ensemble
April 14	KES Skating Party
April 21	Grades 5-7 Spring Choir Concert
April 22	Grades 8-12 Spring Choir Concert

*****ECRWSSEDDM*****

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