



SPARTA AREA SCHOOLS

November/December 2026

BELL RINGER

Home of the Michigan Blue Ribbon Exemplary School

www.spartaschools.org

A Year of Listening: We Want to Hear From You

As we plan for the future of Sparta Area Schools, our intent is simple: listening to the people who know our district best - our students, families, staff, and community members.

This school year will be a year of listening to our community. Throughout the year, we will create several opportunities for parents and community members to share their experiences, ideas, and priorities. The feedback we receive will help inform our work as we develop a district strategic plan, consider the future of our facilities, and look for ways to continue improving the experience of students and families.

Strategic Plan Creation:

October Focus Groups

In October, we held focus groups with our students, staff and our parents. We wanted to know what's going well, where we can do better, and what hopes they have for Sparta Area Schools now and into the coming years.

This information will be combined with more feedback from families in the new year.

Community Survey (After the New Year)

After the winter break, we'll open up a survey to the broader Sparta community to receive input from all parents, staff, students and community partners. This information will be combined with the focus group feedback. All of this data will lead to our new three year strategic plan.

Facilities Study Survey (November 2026):

Our school buildings serve as a point of community pride, and we need your input on how to best maintain and improve them for the future. A November survey will help us consider our facilities from several perspectives: what we need to maintain today, how our buildings are meeting the needs of students and families, what we should consider for the future, and

where we should focus our attention and resources. We will share a survey with our families and also provide this survey to our community as a whole. Your time and input will be essential to our plans as we continue to ensure high quality school facilities for our students and the greater school community.

Annual Family Survey (Late November / Early December 2026):

Our annual family survey is another great way to let us know how we're doing across the district. We'll ask what your family values most, what's working, and where we can grow. Your perspective helps us build a stronger school community every single day. This survey will also be provided to our students to collect their essential input.

We Want to Hear From You! There is a lot to consider when planning for the future of a school district, and we know we don't have all the answers on our

own. All three of these opportunities hold one important theme - Your Voice Matters. That's why listening is such an important part of this year's work. Whether you participate in a focus group, complete a survey, or share your thoughts when an opportunity arises, your feedback will help us better understand what matters to our community. We appreciate the time our families and community members take to share their experiences and ideas. We look forward to listening, learning, and using what we hear to help guide Sparta Area Schools moving forward.

Thank you for being part of the Sparta Area Schools community.

Sincerely,
Joel Stoner
Superintendent
Sparta Area Schools

"Thank you" from the Sparta Sports Boosters

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of our sponsors, advertisers, volunteers, high school sports teams, and community members for their continued support of the Sparta Sports Boosters and our athletes. Throughout the 2025-2026 school year, we were able to fulfill all requests from our athletic programs, contributing over \$30,000 towards the purchase of necessary supplies and equipment.



This year, the Sparta Sports Boosters proudly invested in our student-athletes by funding equipment upgrades, team apparel, and postseason opportunities across multiple sports. Highlights include a weight room upgrade, replacement softball equipment, wrestling mat sanitizers, baseball cameras, a new football push sled, team warm-ups, and travel bags for our growing football program. The Boosters also helped make postseason experiences possible by covering student tickets to playoff games, as well as additional travel expenses for teams and athletes advancing to regional and state competitions. These investments ensure our Spartans have the resources, equipment, and support they need to compete at their highest level while creating memorable experiences throughout the season.

Our organization recognizes the significant contributions of the hundreds of volunteer hours provided by our dedicated coaches, parents, grandparents, and athletes. Your time and efforts have been invaluable in helping us achieve our goals. We are excited about the prospect of another successful year ahead.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the Sparta Sports Boosters, please contact us at spartaboosters@gmail.com. Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our athletic community.

Sincerely,
The Sparta Sports Boosters



AV Group Mentorship Program Builds Connections Between Middle and Elementary Students

This school year, middle school counselor Mrs. Wilson and a group of eighth-grade students are partnering with Miss Beuschel's third-grade class at Appleview Elementary through a new mentorship program called AV Group.

The program was created to build positive relationships between middle school and elementary students while giving eighth-grade students the opportunity to strengthen their leadership skills. The eighth-grade mentors visit Appleview approximately twice a month, where they participate in activities designed to build friendships,

confidence, communication, and leadership skills.

So far this year, the mentors and their third-grade buddies have participated in a "Get to Know You" M&M activity and enjoyed a friendly game of "Dots and Boxes." Each visit gives the students a chance to work together, get to know one another, and build meaningful connections.

The goal of AV Group is to provide eighth-grade students with opportunities to practice important skills such as communication, responsibility, empathy, patience, and positive relationship-building while making a lasting impact

on their younger peers. Throughout the school year, the eighth-grade mentors will serve as positive role models and supportive mentors for their elementary buddies.

The partnership has already become something the third graders look forward to. Miss Beuschel shared that her class gets especially excited when they know their mentors are coming to visit.

Through AV Group, students at both levels are learning from one another and discovering that even small moments of connection can make a big difference.



Pickin’ Pumpkins at Post Family Farms

On September 23rd, our second graders visited Post Family Farms in Hudsonville, MI. Students were able to experience a day at the farm firsthand. Learning all about how pumpkins are grown, engaging in meaningful conversations about livestock and animal education as well as participating in some extra fun things in the children’s courtyard!

Sparta Education Foundation Announces Fall Grants

Thanks to the tremendous generosity of Sparta Education Foundation donors, more than \$23,000 in grants were awarded to educators across the district in September.

Teachers and staff at all five district buildings received funding to support new projects, programs, field trips, and classroom materials that enhance learning for Sparta students.

Exciting highlights include sending all fifth-grade students to the Immerse Program at the Grand Rapids Public Museum in January. Don Crawford’s Digital Photography class was also awarded digital cameras, along with funding for field trips to Hoffmaster State Park and downtown Grand Rapids, where students will put their new equipment to use.

These are just a few examples of the many creative and impactful projects made possible through the Sparta Education Foundation.

Have a Sparta student in your family? Ask their teacher if they have been awarded a grant from Sparta Education Foundation.

Thank you to the generous donors in our community and beyond who continue to invest in our students and make being a Sparta Spartan even better!

Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month: Sparta's Students Learn from Each Other

By Rebecca Chronowski

From Sept. 15 through Oct. 15, communities across the country celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, honoring the history, culture, and contributions of Americans with roots in Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. In Sparta, the celebration starts in the classroom.

Hispanic families have long been part of the Sparta area, many drawn by the region's agricultural work and many staying to raise their children here. Today, those children share classrooms, sports teams, and lunch tables with classmates from every background.

That mix is one of the community's quiet strengths. Students learn about the wider world simply by sitting beside friends whose family stories, languages, and traditions differ from their own. Bilingual students bring skills that will serve them in college and careers, and their classmates gain curiosity, empathy, and a head start on understanding a diverse world.

Hispanic Heritage Month began in 1968 as a week-long observance and was expanded to a full month by Congress in 1988. Sept. 15 was chosen because it marks the independence anniversary of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Mexico and Chile celebrate on Sept. 16 and Sept. 18.

Families and students can take part by reading a book by a Hispanic author, learning a few Spanish phrases, trying a dish from a classmate's culture, or simply introducing themselves to a new neighbor.

When students learn from one another, the whole community benefits. This month, and every month, Sparta's Hispanic students and families help make our schools, and our town, stronger.

New Biome Being Added to Minecraft after 15 Years

By: Mariella Bjork

After 15 long years of only three dimensions in Minecraft, there is officially going to be a fourth dimension added: The Sift. Mojang announced this update on September 26, during the Minecraft live broadcast.

The Sift is first joining a spinoff Minecraft game, Dungeons II, which launched September 29th. The Sift will then join both Java and Bedrock editions sometime in 2027. Though the Sift is already being introduced to players via Dungeons II, Mojang warns the actual Sift could have big differences in the official Minecraft release. The Sift is a very colorful biome, primarily shades of pinks and blues. Though these pastels are not common in typical Minecraft, many players describe the coloring as “a breath of fresh air” and “something new.”



In the Minecraft live stream, they gave a sneak peek of a bunny-like creature walking through the pink grass, displaying the turquoise sky above. This creature is rumored to be called a “singer,” which is a peaceful bunny that communicates through song. The gaming community is very excited to enter the Sift; it will bring “new dangers, discovery, and mystery,” as said by the creators of Minecraft. The Sift is expected to have new mobs, both peaceful and hostile, as well as new blocks and biomes. These blocks will add much

more variety and many more fun additions to the game.“It’s very interesting how Mojang is taking the Sift realm from a different game (Dungeons II) and putting it into Minecraft,” said an active Minecraft player, Evan Vanderstelt. Though Mojang has yet to release the official date that the Sift will be added to Minecraft, players are eager to learn and see more about the Sift. The Minecraft community has already begun playing Dungeons II and is excited to play in the real game!

Art Prize Field Trip

By Melissa Utter

Thanks to a generous grant from the Art Prize Foundation, Applevew fifth graders were treated to a trip to Art Prize September 30. The rain didn't dampen spirits nor appreciation for the dynamic installations across a variety of venues. Interactive installations were the perfect photo spots to capture memories of this fun field trip.



New \$50,000 Matching Gift! Your Donation Will Automatically Double!

The Sparta Education Foundation is thrilled to announce a new \$50,000 matching gift for the new school year! That means your generosity can go twice as far—every donation will be matched, thanks to the incredible generosity of our anonymous donors.

As we celebrate our 35th Anniversary, we’re also excited to launch a new program: Friends of the Foundation!

Friends of the Foundation is our new monthly giving program, making it easy to support the students, educators, and programs you care about all year long. Every gift inspires learning and empowers success.

Become a Friend of the Foundation today by scanning the QR code and joining us in making a lasting difference in our schools and community!



Strong communities grow from strong roots.

Sparta is built on hard work, family, and generations of agricultural producers who know that a healthy harvest starts with strong roots. We are proud to be a community “On the Ridge,” and just as our orchards and farms grow because they are carefully planted, nurtured, and supported, so do our students.

Blue & White Night is more than just a fun evening of food, celebration and community, it generates critical funding for classroom resources and innovative learning tools.

Join us “On the Ridge” on Thursday, March 11, 2027 at The Casnovia Barn!



Black Hawk Touches Down at Sparta High School for Patriot Game

By: Jackson Stewart

The roar of rotor blades filled the air as a Black Hawk helicopter, piloted by Sean Moody, landed on Sparta High School's practice field ahead of the football team's Patriot Game.

Moody loves his job and is deeply dedicated to keeping the country safe. "My husband is in the Army full time," said his wife, Mrs. Moody.

The idea came from Coach Patterson, who asked whether the helicopter could make an appearance for the game. Once it landed, the entire football team got to climb inside and take pictures with it.

"Having the helicopter there was tough," said player Tate Ryan.

The helicopter set down right next to the football field, and both the landing and the takeoff went smoothly. The visit was a perfect fit for the Patriot Game theme, and fans and players alike loved it.



"This whole thing was able to happen because of Mrs. Moody," said Mr. Landry.

A helicopter landing like this has happened only once before, seven years ago. Hopefully, it will become a new tradition.

“Thank you” to Sparta Fire Department, from ECC

Huge thank you to the Sparta Fire Department for visiting the ECC to show our preschool students Engine 3 and teach them about fire safety!



Sparta Middle School - Bellringer: October 8th, 2026



6th Grade Camp was a HUGE Success!

Our 6th graders got to attend 6th Grade Camp, a longstanding Sparta Middle School tradition. This year, our campers enjoyed perfect fall weather. They also had the opportunity to participate in fun activities, get to know their classmates and experience an overnight adventure away from home in a beautiful place!



SMS Student Government Organized a Spirit Days & Sparty Cup During Homecoming Week!



Check out Mr. Karsies, SMS Science teacher, rocking it with our students on “anything but a backpack” day during Spirit Week!



The Sparta Middle School Cheer Team rocked our Sparty Cup Assembly, getting the crowd going with their “true-Blue” school spirit!

National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) Inducted More than 40 Students at SMS!

In September, we had the honor of inducting over 40 7th and 8th graders into our Sparta Middle School National Junior Honor Society Chapter. The tenants of NJHS are Scholarship, Leadership, Citizenship, Service and Character. Our young people were selected based on their actions. They have truly shown that they are committed to living up to the high standards of the NJHS. Our staff and parents could not be prouder!



A special “thank you” goes out to our NJHS Faculty Council; Ms. Barringer, Ms. Nichols, Ms. Nieboer, Ms. Carls and Mr. Karsies. Ms. Sack, our faculty NJHS Leader and Advisor, also deserves a huge shout out for working so hard to bring this opportunity to our amazing students at SMS.



10-Year-old Shocks the Science Community

By: Maggie Jacob
Two years ago, Jo Nagai, a 10-year-old boy, noticed butterflies he had raised returned to him.

The behavior made him wonder if butterflies could remember experiences from their caterpillar stage. Over the next two years, actions from Nagai's butterflies led to collaborations to explore the insect memory that survived through

metamorphosis. Jo Nagai was raising Asian Swallowtail Butterflies from his hometown, Kobe, Japan, when he discovered that each time he released his butterflies, they would briefly linger and then fly back to him. Nagai further wanted to dive deeper into the observation and started a home experiment in collaboration with a Georgetown University scientist. In 2026, this home experiment later led to a 33-page research



report that shocked the science community. We asked around to get people's thoughts on this discovery and how it impacts or relates back

to a human life. "It's incredible that you can relate it to your human experiences and how the past can shape you as a person," Kleyan said.

This comparison was drawn to relate to human development, where the childhood phases are similar to caterpillar phases.

As an adult, you still remember all the things you went through as a child. Another perspective shared: "You go through many changes in life, and it's important to remember those changes, because it shows what you've gone through to get you where you are today,"

Mari said. This explains the idea of personal growth and identity formed by the experiences and transformations undergone throughout life. Nagai's presentation drew the attention of researchers from around the world, many of whom were amazed that such a significant contribution to the field had come from an elementary school student. Even the slightest bit of curiosity could potentially lead to a scientific

Sparta's Class of 2027 won Homecoming for the 3-peat

By: Gavin Wilson
The Class of 2027 had another Homecoming to remember as students came together for the annual Homecoming games at Sparta High School.

Israel Burman, a student of the Class of 2027, said, "I feel really proud of us seniors. I think that we deserved this win because of our work, whether that was with Mock Rock, games in the gym, the cafeteria events, and even our football team and marching band. I, being a part of the marching band and other events, can say that everyone worked hard, but we came out on top." This really shows that the Class of 2027's victory wasn't just about the game or a lucky break, but came from the non-stop effort everyone put

into everything from Mock Rock to all the other competitions.

Ms. Kmiecik, the Class Advisor for the Class of 2027, said, "I am so proud of them! Winning Homecoming for the third straight year is such an

accomplishment, and I am so happy they got their 3-peat. They put so much time, creativity, heart, and determination into everything they did. They truly showed up and showed up in numbers. As an advisor, I couldn't be more proud of this group. They made it happen, and they earned their 3-peat!"



Having the Class of 2027 advisor highlight this historic milestone reminds us that pulling off a three-year winning streak took serious dedication, massive student turnout, and a ton of pride from the entire Class of 2027.

Throughout the games, the Class of 2027 showed strong teamwork, energy, and determination. Students worked together during each challenge, encouraging their classmates and keeping the excitement high.

In the end, the Class of 2027 came out on top, officially earning its third consecutive Homecoming win. The victory gave the senior class another reason to celebrate and created a memorable moment for the entire class. Winning three years in a row is an accomplishment that shows these classes' continued school spirit and commitment. As the Class of 2027 looks ahead to the rest of their final school year, students will carry the excitement and pride of another Homecoming victory with them.

New Coach, New Approach: Dykuizen Aims to Lift Sparta Soccer

By: Asher Enlow

The new soccer coach, Cory Dykuizen, has started his first year out strong at Sparta High School.

A new coach is bringing a new approach to Sparta's boys varsity and JV soccer teams this season. Cory Dykuizen took a role in the program hoping to help the team improve after struggling in past years. Dykuizen said his main goal this season is to move Sparta out of the bottom of the conference and into the middle of the standings. He hopes to put the team in position for a winnable home district game, while making sure the players have fun. "I saw the team was lacking the past couple



of years and thought I could bring something to the team and improve the program," Dykuizen said. Players have noticed Dykuizen's adaptable approach to the game. Jack Schulz, junior on the team, said Dykuizen understands how different players like to play while still allowing them room to experiment. "I think he's a good coach. He's got the right mentality going into games, and he knows how to switch the formation for different

teams we come across," Schulz said. Dykuizen's favorite memories from the season so far include Sparta's first win against Grant, and a close 1-0 loss to Lowell. Those games have helped shape the early part of his first season.

With Dykuizen focused on improving the team's position in the conference, Sparta is working toward a season that combines improvement, competition and fun.

Sparta Boys Tennis Wins Conference Championship

By: lodown staff

The Sparta boys tennis team won the conference championship Friday, Oct. 2, at the River Cities Alliance tournament hosted at Sparta High School. Seven of the eight flights reached the finals, and four of them won titles.

The Spartans entered the tournament with a 5-0 conference record. Head coach Chad Wagner said he was pleased with the team's effort and dedication all season.

"We work hard every day and don't compete for the end results. We hope that through our hard work and consistency, good results will happen naturally," Wagner said.



The flight champions were Oliver Jacques at third singles, Carson Bosch at fourth singles, Leo Olvera and Ethan Haney at third doubles, and Rylan Keusch and Parker VanLoo at fourth doubles.

Bosch, VanLoo, Haney and Olvera are all playing their first varsity season. Bosch played JV as a freshman.

Olvera said staying positive was key to his success as a newcomer.

"Attitude was huge for me. As a new player

I knew that I was going to make mistakes. I tried not to let mistakes affect my mental game. In our match against Coopersville, we lost the first set, but Ethan and I knew that we were going to play better so we just kept a positive attitude and won the next two sets," Olvera said.

The mental side of tennis is a major focus of Wagner's program.

Sparta plays in regionals Wednesday, Oct. 7, at Forest Hills Eastern.

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