



# WE ARE GR

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January 2025 | Vol. 22 | Issue 3 | Section A

Thanks to the generosity of our advertisers, this newsletter was funded using minimal taxpayer dollars.

## Celebrating 175 Years of Grand Rapids: A Look to the Future With the Community Master Plan



Dear community member:

New Year observations are important for those looking forward and reflecting on the past. Here in Grand Rapids,

2025 will be filled with opportunities to do just that. Of note, our City celebrates its 175th year of incorporation this year on April 2. It was officially established on May 2, 1850, when the village of Grand Rapids voted to accept the proposed city charter.

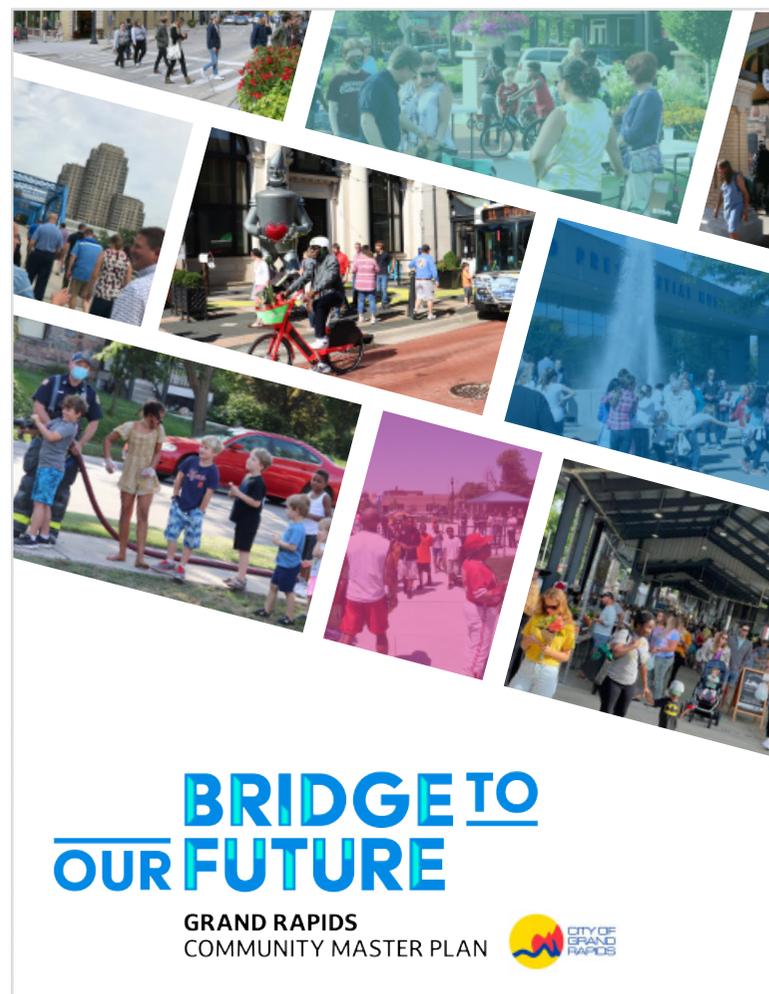
To mark our demisemiseptcentennial – fancy way to say “175 years” – our community is planning celebrations spanning 175 days this year. Our inclusive celebrations will honor those who formed the city and those

native to the lands it was built upon. Look for event updates in the coming months and news on how you can get involved.

As we look to the future of Grand Rapids as they did in 1850, we will also look to build upon the great work the community did in crafting our “Bridge to Our Future,” Grand Rapids’ Community Master Plan (CMP). In December, our City Commission adopted the new land use blueprint for how our community will grow and develop over the next 20 years. The plan is a guiding document for the organization and is aligned with the City’s five-year strategic plan.

Thousands of Grand Rapidsians participated in the CMP creation effort that spanned two years. Based on this public engagement and data analysis, the process established five chapters expressing community goals and five themes reflecting the community’s values that are woven throughout the plan. Each chapter contains recommendations for policies, programs and projects to advance Grand Rapids. Community goal areas are great neighborhoods, vital business districts, a strong economy, balanced mobility and desirable development character while the themes are equity, safety, vibrancy, culture and sustainability.

The CMP also incorporates our City’s 11 previously established Area Specific Plans (ASPs) and adds three more ASPs developed for the Butterworth, Creston and Southtown neighborhoods as part of the CMP process. ASPs more closely examine a particular geographic area of the city within the framework of the CMP and tailor recommendations to the needs of area residents, businesses and property owners. They can serve as a catalyst to organize neighborhoods, increase citizen technical skills and attract desired private sector investment.



Now that the Bridge to Our Future is in print, it’s time to implement it. The recommendations in the document will take some time to accomplish and are ongoing or short, medium and long-term. What’s more, some – such as review, discussion, and update of the Zoning Ordinance – are under the purview of the City, while others rely on our partners to accomplish. I look forward to partnering with the community over the coming years to make these recommendations a reality. For more information about the CMP, please visit [grandrapidsmi.gov/cmp](http://grandrapidsmi.gov/cmp).

I look forward to serving this community in 2025 and helping our staff and elected officials elevate the quality of life for all residents.

Mark Washington, City Manager

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1331 Franklin S.E., PO Box 117  
Grand Rapids, MI 49501-0117

# Congratulations on your new home!



## New homeowner?

### Attend a free seminar on property tax basics and the appeal process

Are you a new homeowner in Grand Rapids? If so, please note that you will or will soon receive an Assessment Notice and Assessment Appeal Process Mailer from our Assessor's Office. To help you make sense of all this and other information, the Assessor offers free seminars on property tax basics and the appeal process for new homeowners in the City of Grand Rapids.

We invite you to attend a free seminar on January 24 or 25 to learn:

- What the assessment notice tells you about your property and property tax
- The assessment appeal process
- Deadlines and expectations

Friday, Jan. 24 at 2 p.m. / Saturday, Jan. 25 at 10 a.m.

Grand Rapids City Hall - 300 Monroe Ave. NW  
City Hall Multipurpose Room, Monroe Level

Register at [grandrapidsmi.gov/property-tax-seminar](http://grandrapidsmi.gov/property-tax-seminar)  
We encourage you to park in the Government Center Parking Ramp. Parking will be validated.



### City Reminds Community Members of Sidewalk Clearing Requirements

A reminder to residents and business owners that it is your responsibility to keep the sidewalks adjacent to your property clear of all snow and ice.

City ordinance requires that all property owners completely clear all ice and snow, full width of sidewalk down to the concrete, from sidewalks adjacent to their property within 24 hours of a snowfall. When the City receives a complaint about a sidewalk that has not been cleared, the property owner will be mailed a written Notice of Complaint or a notice will be posted on the property of the violation.

Sidewalks not cleared within 48 hours following the notice to clear will result in the City snow removal contractor completing the work. The property owner will be billed for all cost associated with clearing the sidewalks. Initial cost is \$183 for the first 15 minutes plus an additional \$44 for every 15 minutes the crew is on site. During last year's winter, the City received 467 complaints and forced to clear 80 of those sidewalks.

Enforcement of this ordinance is even applicable to those who might happen to own property along the more than 200 miles

of sidewalk in the City's Sidewalk Snow Support program. After the City's contractor provides sidewalk snow removal support in the area, property owners and residents are still responsible for removing any remaining snow and ice.

Prompt removal of snow and ice keep the city's sidewalks safe and accessible, particularly for neighbors, postal carriers, and children walking to and from school.

"Shoveled sidewalks contribute to the livability of our neighborhoods by providing year-round mobility options for all residents, especially those who are not able to drive or who choose not to drive," said City Engineer Tim Burkman. "Promptly clearing snow and ice keeps our pedestrian network safe and accessible in the winter months, particularly for seniors, children, and those with disabilities, so that all people can get to work, school, healthcare, shopping, and places of worship."

Individuals needing assistance in clearing sidewalks should contract with a private snowplowing company or seek out possible alternatives via the United Way (2-1-1) or their neighborhood association.

### BE IN THE KNOW!

Your City. Your News. Right at your fingertips.

GRconnected

Commission  
Connected

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR  
E-NEWSLETTERS



# \$10 million in lead service line replacements slated this year

The City of Grand Rapids is dedicated to protecting public health and is actively replacing all lead service lines.

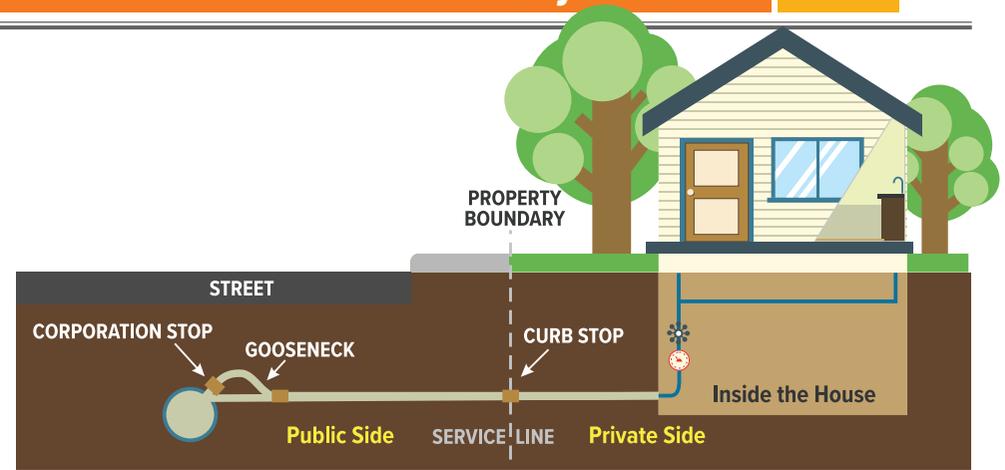
In 2017, the City began replacing lead service lines at zero cost to homeowners and commercial properties. These replacements happen during emergency leaks or planned construction projects.

The City allocates \$8 million annually to fund these replacements. The City has also secured state loans and federal grants to fund lead service line replacements.

Since 2017, these investments have facilitated the replacement of 7,000 lead service lines, including 1,400 in 2024. Of these, 52% were replaced in the First Ward, 26% in the Second Ward, and 22% in the Third Ward, and 300 private lead service lines were replaced in the Neighborhoods of Focus through an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant awarded to the city in 2021. Approximately 19,000 lead service lines remain citywide.

## Is my home scheduled for a lead service line replacement?

Tenants and property owners will receive a letter, door hanger, or call informing them of their upcoming lead service line replacement and the steps to begin the process. If you receive a letter, it is important that you contact us as soon as possible so we can obtain your permission to replace the lead service line on your property. To find out if your home is scheduled for a lead service line replacement within the next 24 months, email us at [leadfreewater@grcity.us](mailto:leadfreewater@grcity.us). You also can use the city's water service line mapping tool at [grcity.us/LSL](http://grcity.us/LSL) or scan the QR code to search for a property address and determine if a lead service line exists.



## 2025 Replacement Schedule

In 2025, the city plans to invest \$10 million to replace approximately 1,500 lead service lines. The replacements are scheduled for the following streets

Street	From	To
Auburn AVE SE	Lake Dr	Fulton
Baraga St NE	Houseman	Diamond
Boston St SE	Calvin	Plymouth
Brown St SW	Steele	Horton
Burton St SE	Division	Eastern
Burton St SE	Eastern	Kalamazoo
Caledonia St NE	Railroad	Plainfield
Center Ave NE	Ann	Knapp
Cesar E Chávez Ave SW	Hall	Beacon
Dayton St SW	Garfield	Straight
Division Ave S	Detroit	Quigley
Eleanor St NE	Oakwood	Cheshire
Elliott St SE	Kalamazoo	Giddings
Elliott St SE	Madison	Union
Elm St SW	Darwin	Buchanan
Fox St SW	W End	Buchanan
Fremont Ave NW	12th	Leonard
Fremont St NW	Webster	Dorothy
Garfield Ave SW	Butterworth	Fulton
Griggs St SW	Jerome	Feakin
Hamilton Ave NW	Crosby	Myrtle
Indiana Ave SW	Butterworth	Sibley
Innes St NE	Union	Diamond
Joslin St SE	Eastern	Blaine
Lyon St NE	Diamond	Mack
Lyon St NE	Lafayette	Eastern
Merritt St SE	Blaine	Nelson
Palmer ST NE	Monroe/Coit	Center/Lafayette
Queen Ave NE	Quimby	Sweet Avenue Alley
Quimby St NE	Railroad	Queen
Rose St SW	Darwin	Division
Spring St NE	Harvey	Race
Stevens St SW	Steele	Randolph
Storrs St SE	Madison	Union
Temple St SE	Eastern	Kalamazoo
Thomas St SE	Eastern	Fuller
Union Ave SE	Mulford	Hoyt
Union Ave SE	Burton	Dickinson
Valley Ave NW	W Fulton	Bridge
Wealthy St SE	Benjamin	Ethel
Wealthy St SE	Ethel	City Line

## Minimizing Lead Exposure

Tap water may be a source of lead if there is a lead water service line or old plumbing and fixtures in the home. However, the most common lead exposure in the city is from deteriorated lead-based paint. Children under six years old living in pre-1978 housing are most at risk. For those that are pregnant, lead can harm the unborn baby. Parents of young children and pregnant people should consult their healthcare provider about blood lead testing. People who do not have a healthcare provider may contact the Kent County Health Department at (616) 632-7100 to learn where to get a blood lead test.

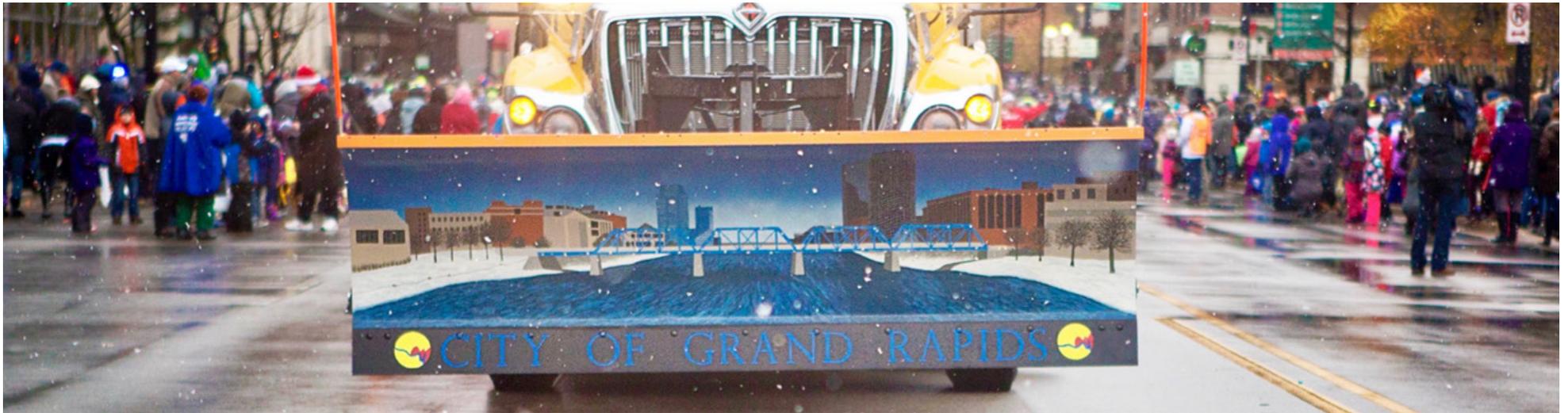
These simple steps offer protection from lead in drinking water.

- Only use cold water for drinking, cooking, making ice, beverages, and infant formula. Boiling water does not remove lead from water.
- If the home has a lead service line, a pregnant person, or children six

years of age or less, consider buying a filter that meets NSF standard 53. When using a filter, follow the manufacturer's recommendation for maintenance and replacement.

- Keep your water moving by doing everyday activities such as taking a shower, flushing the toilet, running a load of laundry, and washing dishes.
- Remove and clean your faucet aerators at least once every six months to remove trapped debris.
- A licensed plumber can inform you about alternate lead-free approved materials for your household plumbing. Visit [www.epa.gov/water](http://www.epa.gov/water) for more information about lead-free plumbing products.

For more information about lead in drinking water or the Lead Line Replacement Program, visit [grcity.us/LSL](http://grcity.us/LSL) or call 616.456.3000. To learn more about lead exposure and resources that may be available, visit [gettingaheadoflead.com](http://gettingaheadoflead.com).



## This is How We Plow City Streets

*Ever wonder how we operate snow clearing on our streets? We're here to demystify the process.*

Our primary goal is to clear all roads of snow within 24-36 hours of a weather event

We're constantly improving our winter operations, so we can deliver the highest level of service to our community. Our plow operators use de-icing materials on major streets to minimize snow and ice. Pretreating material may be applied to bridges, hills and curves before a snow event, if needed. We work hard to minimize our salt use as part of our commitment to environmental sustainability as it reduces runoff in our rivers and streams. This is also part of our commitment to be a good steward of funds. Plus, many of our plow trucks have side wings that plow an additional half lane of snow.

When we do have to use salt, our plow trucks have liquid storage capabilities. This allows for the pre-wetting of salt as plows spread it on street surfaces. Pre-wetting salt reduces the bounce to keep it on the road. It also helps us reduce the amount of salt we use by 30 percent – another money saver. Plus, salt activates faster when treated.

### We Prioritize Plowing on First-Attention Routes

The major high-traffic streets in our city are first-attention streets for snow plowing. These streets carry the most traffic and have the highest speed limits. We apply salt to all first-attention streets to make travel safe. Examples of first attention streets include:

- Burton Street
- Division Avenue
- Fulton Street
- Leonard Street
- Monroe Avenue



### We plow secondary (local) streets and alleys when more than 3 inches of snow falls

We monitor weather conditions and clear secondary streets and alleys when there are more than 3 inches of snow. These streets are often less traveled and have lower speeds. De-icing salt typically is not applied to secondary streets. We may salt these streets if there are hills, severe curves or special circumstances in the city. This protects our local watershed and keeps winter maintenance costs manageable.

Examples of secondary streets include:

- Side streets like Merrifield St
- Cul-de-sacs
- Alleys

Extended snow events may require snow plow crews to leave secondary streets and return to first-attention roads to ensure safety on high-traffic streets. While we make every effort to clear bike lanes our main priority is to keep the automobile travel lanes clear of snow and ice.

## DART Carshare, offering another flexible and affordable transportation choice!

Mobile GR is thrilled to offer DART CarShare, an innovative carshare program designed to enhance mobility and reduce transportation costs for residents and visitors of Grand Rapids.

Users can easily reserve, unlock and pay for vehicles through a user-friendly mobile app, MDO Carshare (found on Apple and Google app stores) making this program seamless and accessible.

**For more information about DART and how to get started, please visit [DARTGR.ORG](https://DARTGR.ORG).**



Grand Rapids  
evCarShare





## Enhancing Accessibility To Government Through Video

The City of Grand Rapids is committed to fostering an engaged and connected community through culturally responsive and proactive communication. This commitment is a key priority outlined in the City's Strategic Plan, which emphasizes that "Residents and stakeholders have awareness of, and voice in, decisions that affect them and receive culturally responsive and proactive communication."

In 2024, the City's Communications Department made significant strides in increasing resident access to government through live coverage of municipal meetings. It streamed approximately 250 hours of various meetings on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Government Access Comcast Channel 26. This initiative ensures that community members can stay informed and involved in local governance.

Each month, the City livestreams City Commission meetings, including legislative meetings such as the Committee on Appointments, Fiscal Committee, Community Development Committee, Committee of the Whole, Public Safety Committee, and Economic Development Project Team. Additionally, the Civilian Appeal Board, Planning Commission, and Brownfield Redevelopment Authority meetings are also available for viewing. To further enhance accessibility, all Committee of the Whole and Commission Meetings include real-time Spanish interpretation on a dedicated YouTube channel.

The City is also dedicated to building trust, accessibility and transparency within the community through engaging video content on social media. The Communications Department produces a variety of social media shorts and video vlogs, along with two informative series featuring short, animated videos.

The Service Spotlight series highlights essential services offered by the City, covering topics such as "When Do I Call 311?," "Hosting an Event in The City of Grand Rapids," and "What Do I Do When it Snows in Grand Rapids?" Meanwhile, the Government 101 series educates residents on the workings of City government, with episodes on "City Commissioners," "Commission Meetings," "Legislative Committees," "Voting," "Budget," and more.

We invite everyone to tune into Grand Rapids video content and watch your government in action. Tune into Government Access Comcast Channel 26 or watch on the City's Facebook ([facebook.com/CityofGrandRapids](https://facebook.com/CityofGrandRapids)) and YouTube ([youtube.com/TheCityofGrandRapids](https://youtube.com/TheCityofGrandRapids)) channels. Together, let's stay informed and engaged.

**If you choose to keep a firearm in your home, you are legally responsible for ensuring that the weapon is stored in a safe manner, and not easily accessible to children or other unauthorized persons.**

Free gun locks are available at GRPD Headquarters (1 Monroe Center) by asking the reception desk - no ID needed or questions asked. Many neighborhood associations also have them on hand.

For more information on gun safety and the safe storage law, visit [michigan.gov/mdhhs](https://michigan.gov/mdhhs)



## Construction of New Fire Station Progressing



The new Kendall Street Fire Station is going vertical. Masonry walls are well underway and have started to show the shape of the apparatus bay. Steel stud framing is just getting started on the north living quarters side of the building. Concrete continues to be poured and electrical and plumbing rough-ins have started with underground and in-wall rough-ins. The building will really take shape over the next few weeks after crews construct the walls and roof trusses.



## EGLE Grants Permit for Grand River Restoration

Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) has issued a permit for the Grand River restoration project to the City of Grand Rapids. The City, in partnership with Grand Rapids WhiteWater (GRWW), submitted a revised permit application in May 2024 for a modified design for the lower reach of the Grand River in downtown Grand Rapids.

State approval allows the City to begin bidding for the construction contract this winter with in-river construction expected to start in summer 2025. The City's and GRWW's river restoration design team estimates that it will take two construction seasons to complete the project.

The design team is diligently working with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on the last remaining approval of a Watershed Project Plan-Environmental Assessment, which will determine the level of federal funding NRCS provides to the project. It expects a final decision from NRCS in spring 2025.

The river restoration project has sparked millions of dollars of additional investment in the river corridor and the City of Grand Rapids, truly embracing the Grand River as a vital part of our community and a River For All.



## Community Preparedness Workshops

Ready to help your community be better prepared for the unexpected? Join the Office of Emergency Management for our Grand Rapids Community Preparedness Workshops, where we'll take a deep dive into understanding your readiness and discuss being prepared for future disasters.

### Workshop Dates (Evenings):

- Wednesday, Feb. 26
- Thursday, Feb. 27
- Wednesday, March 5
- **Mark your calendar – let's work together to build a prepared and ready community!**

Stay tuned for more info on our webpage: [grandrapidsmi.gov/CERT](http://grandrapidsmi.gov/CERT) and social media: **Facebook & Instagram @readygrandrapids** **Twitter/X @readyCityGR**.

# TAX TIPS

## Be Aware of Identity Theft and Tax-Related Scams

Our Grand Rapids Income Tax Department wants you to be aware of several email and phone scams that target taxpayers this filing season. Cybercriminals collect names, social security numbers and addresses that they then use to file fraudulent returns.

One scam features thieves posing as representatives of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), IRS taxpayer assistance center, a professional tax organization, a tax software company, IRS refunds, the State of Michigan or the City of Grand Rapids. The email scam tricks taxpayers into opening a link in an email or requests personal information over the phone.

In the email scam, personal information is stolen when inputted. Malware may also be secretly downloaded. Malware gives the thief control of the computer or allows the thief to track keystrokes to determine passwords or other critical data. The phone call scam involves operators telling taxpayers that a warrant will be issued for their arrest if they do not comply and immediately pay their debt.

If you receive a suspicious call, the Grand Rapids Income Tax Department encourages you to let the callers know that the call will be returned after you confirm that it is legitimate. Please then contact the City and IRS to report the suspicious phone call or email. Contact information includes:

- City of Grand Rapids: 616.456.3415, option zero, or email [grincometax@grcity.us](mailto:grincometax@grcity.us)
- IRS: <https://www.irs.gov/privacy-disclosure/report-phishing>.

Remember: The City of Grand Rapids does not conduct door-to-door collections or initiate contact by calling homes asking immediate payment. It is rare for the Income Tax Department to initiate contact via phone or email without a taxpayer contacting the department first.

## Grand Rapids Income Tax Office Offers Extended Hours

Need help filing your income tax return? Our Income Tax Office is here to help – in fact, we are opening on selected Saturdays starting in March to help you file your city return.

The office will be open 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. the following Saturdays:

- March 8th, 22nd
- April 5th, 12th, 26th

You can also visit the Income Tax office during regular hours – 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Be sure to bring your photo ID, the first page of your federal return and any W-2s, 1099s or schedules that you may have.

Walk-ins are welcome; however, to avoid lines, you can make an appointment by emailing [grincometax@grcity.us](mailto:grincometax@grcity.us) or calling 616.456.3415 and selecting option 0.

Our Income Tax office is located on the third floor of City Hall, 300 Monroe Ave NW. Validated parking is available in the Government Center Parking Ramp off Monroe and Ottawa.

*The filing deadline for 2024 City of Grand Rapids income tax returns is Wednesday, April 30.*




## RESOLVE TO BE READY

Still looking for your New Year's resolution? As we step into the new year, it's a great time to focus on personal safety and emergency preparedness to be ready for whatever 2025 brings.

We invite you to follow the four simple steps below to start the new year off right:

 **Sign up for local alerts and warnings.**

- Whether it's weather-related, health emergencies or natural disasters, staying informed can make a world of difference.
- The City of Grand Rapids offers a free opt-in emergency alert system that provides timely notifications to keep you and your loved ones safe. Take a few moments to visit [grandrapidsmi.gov/emergencyalerts](http://grandrapidsmi.gov/emergencyalerts) and sign up – registration takes less than 2 minutes!

 **Create an emergency kit for your home, your car and your workplace.**

- Having essential supplies on hand can save lives during an unexpected situation. Your kits should include food and water, medications, flashlights, batteries, first aid supplies and important documents.
- Don't forget to tailor your kits to your specific needs, such as infant supplies, pet care items or extra clothing for extreme weather. By assembling well-stocked kits, you'll have peace of mind knowing you're ready to face a variety of emergencies. Visit [ready.gov/kit](http://ready.gov/kit) for a full list of supplies!

 **Make a family/household communications plan.**

- Establish clear guidelines on how you and your family will stay in touch, where to meet and who to contact. Visit [ready.gov/plan](http://ready.gov/plan) for a fillable form.
- In the chaos of an emergency, it's easy to lose track of important information. Ensure that your financial plans are in place, such as having access to emergency funds or digital payment options. Obtain property (homeowners or renters), health and life insurance if you do not have them.

 **Lastly, practice your plan.**

- Do so regularly to ensure everyone knows what to do and how to stay connected. By turning these steps into a habit, you'll improve your readiness and feel more confident facing the unexpected.

By taking these steps, you're not just making a resolution – you're ensuring you and your loved ones are ready for whatever comes your way. Emergency preparedness is a continuous process. Making it part of your routine will provide peace of mind and resilience in the face of unexpected events. As you work through these tasks, remember that the effort you put in today could be the key to your safety tomorrow. Make this year the one where you take charge of your preparedness – for yourself, your family and your community!



## Cold Weather Is Here! Be Safe Heating Your Home

Make sure your heating appliance is correct and operational and avoid alternative heating practices. Your Grand Rapids Fire Department reminds you that a gas stove or oven is not an appropriate solution and poses a significant risk by increasing the chances of carbon monoxide poisoning or fire.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is odorless and tasteless, and it can kill. Every home using gas-fired appliances should have the appropriate amount of CO detectors to warn of this colorless and odorless gas.

More than 400 Americans die from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning every year. So far this year, our Fire Department has responded to 106 calls for CO.

Using portable heaters or fire places also can put you at risk. Here are some tips:

- Space heaters should have a clear space of at least 3 feet in all directions and be turned off when you go to bed.
- Kerosene space heaters also produce CO and need to have proper ventilation. They should only be refueled outdoors.
- Never use gasoline in a kerosene heater.
- Generators should never be refueled while running. Always allow them to cool down before refilling the tank.
- Generators produce CO, so only use them outside – never inside the home or in an attached garage

# PARK PROJECTS UPDATE



Parks and  
Recreation



## Plaza Roosevelt Greenspace

The Parks and Recreation Department is excited to share an update on the Plaza Roosevelt Greenspace project, a 0.77-acre site located at 680 Cesar E. Chavez Ave SW, at the northeast corner of Cesar E. Chavez Ave SW and Rumsey Street SW. Neighbor engagement has been at the heart of this project. By collaborating with local organizations, nearby schools, and neighbors, we've ensured this greenspace is truly designed with the people, for the people. We're also thrilled to announce that a contractor has been selected, and construction on these long-awaited improvements will begin this spring! Construction is expected to complete by the end of 2025, with some light landscape work occurring in 2026. This transformation will turn an undeveloped greenspace into a vibrant community hub for recreation, relaxation, and connection. Stay tuned as we take the next steps toward creating a greenspace our entire community can enjoy.

## Houseman Field

We are thrilled to announce much-needed improvements to the Houseman Field Playground, located at 901 Fountain St NE in the Midtown neighborhood, and in partnership with the Midtown Neighborhood Association. This beloved greenspace will soon feature exciting updates, including new play structures with climbing components, a new swing set, benches, picnic tables, landscape beds, and walkways—offering something for everyone to enjoy.

We're also inviting neighbors to play an active role in this transformation by joining us for a community build project! This unique opportunity allows volunteers to come together and help build the new playground during a single day. Tools, instructions, food, and on-site guidance will all be provided to ensure a fun and rewarding experience. Interested in volunteering? Sign up using the link below to receive more details and express your interest in being part of this incredible project. Let's build it—together!





**Parks and Recreation**



**Register online**  
grandrapidsmi.gov/recgr



**Register by phone**  
616.456.3696, option #1



**Register in person**  
245 State St SE

# ADULT FITNESS

## MARCH/APRIL 2025

### SESSION DATES

March 10 - May 4 (No classes April 6-13)  
(7 weeks)

### SESSION COST

\$45/residents, \$55/nonresidents

### REGISTRATION IS OPEN

February 3 at 8:00 am

#### YOGA

- BASIC YOGA
- GENTLE YOGA
- POWER YOGA
- VITAL MOVEMENT
- FIRESIDE YOGA

#### AQUATICS

- WATER AEROBICS

#### CYCLING

- CYCLING
- CYCLE & TONE

#### CARDIO & STRENGTH

- BARRE
- HIIT EXPRESS
- HIGH LOW FITNESS
- KETTLEBELL AMPD
- PILATES
- POUND
- STRENGTH & POWER
- STRENGTH & ROW
- PUMPED UP STRENGTH

#### DANCE FITNESS

- BALLROOM DANCE
- GENTLE MUSICAL MOVEMENT
- MINDFUL MUSICAL MOVEMENT
- WERQ
- ZUMBA
- EXTREME HIP HOP STEP

Full class details will be available online at:  
[grandrapidsmi.gov/recgr](http://grandrapidsmi.gov/recgr)



View looking West of a pedestrian bridge at Riverside Park, 2001 Monroe Ave. NE - Photo courtesy Leigh Moore, Grand Rapids



### Main Library

111 Library St NE  
616.988.5400

### Madison Square

1201 Madison Ave SE  
616.988.5411

### Ottawa Hills

1150 Giddings Ave SE  
616.988.5412

### Seymour

2350 Eastern Ave SE  
616.988.5413

### Van Belkum

1563 Plainfield Ave NE  
616.988.5410

### West Leonard

1017 Leonard St NW  
616.988.5416

### West Side

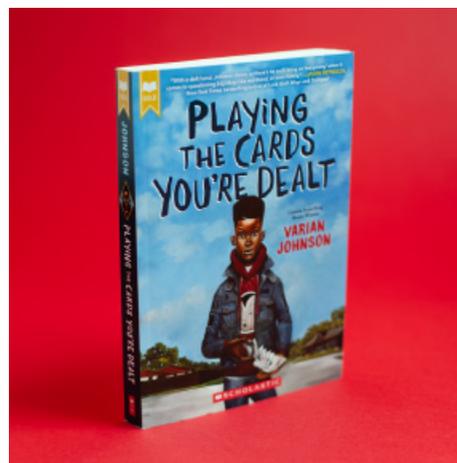
713 Bridge St NW  
616.988.5414

### Yankee Clipper

2025 Leonard St NE  
616.988.5415

grpl.org

## One Book, One City for Kids



One Book, One City for Kids is an annual reading program that encourages all 5th graders in the city to read and discuss the same book. The 2025 selection is *Playing the Cards You're Dealt* by Varian Johnson.

One Book, One City for Kids is funded by The Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation, The Wege Foundation, and The Michigan Arts & Culture Council. Book Sponsors: Independent Bank, Brad and Gayl Kessel, and Missad Foundation.

### About the author:

Varian Johnson is the author of several novels for children and young adults, including *The Parker Inheritance*, which won both Coretta Scott King Author Honor and Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor awards; *The Great Greene Heist*, an ALA Notable Children's Book, a Kirkus Reviews Best Book, and a Texas Library Association Lone Star List selection; and the graphic novel *Twins* co-created with Shannon Wright, an NPR Best Book. You can find out more about Johnson at [varianjohnson.com](http://varianjohnson.com).

### About the book:

Ten-year-old Anthony Joplin is excited to finally be old enough to play in the spades tournament, a big deal for every Joplin Man. While his friends worry about school and girls, Ant only cares about living up to his dad's expectations at the card table. But when his best friend gets grounded, Ant needs a new partner. Shirley, the new girl in class, isn't who he imagined—she talks a lot of smack and plays tough. Ant's not sure his dad would like him teaming up with a girl, but Shirley is smart and knows her cards. So Ant teams up with her and keeps it a secret. But soon, he finds out his dad has a huge secret too, one that might tear their family apart.

### Family Card Game Day

Monday, February 17  
1:00 – 3:00 pm Main Library

Join us for an afternoon of card game fun! The library will provide a variety of card games for families to play. Attendees are welcome to bring their own deck of cards, too. This free event is designed for kids and teens.



### Author Talk with Varian Johnson

Wednesday, March 26  
1:00 – 2:00 pm St. Cecilia Music Center  
24 Ransom Ave NE

Varian Johnson will discuss his writing process and answer questions about his book *Playing the Cards You're Dealt*. This event is designed for upper elementary classes, homeschool students, and community members.

## Black History Month

### Black History Month Storytimes

Join us for a series of storytimes during Black History Month. Storytimes will highlight Black stories and include songs, fingerplays, and hands-on fun. Classes end with a special art activity and playtime.

Monday, February 3

10:30 am Main Library  
6:30 pm West Leonard

Tuesday, February 4

10:30 am Madison Square  
10:30 am West Side

Wednesday, February 5

10:30 am Seymour  
6:30 pm Van Belkum

Thursday, February 6

10:30 am Yankee Clipper

Friday, February 7

10:30 am Ottawa Hills

### Tracing the Steps | African American Women During the Progressive Era in Grand Rapids

Tuesday, February 18  
6:30 – 7:30 pm Main Library

Join Sophia Brewer, an academic librarian at Grand Rapids Community College, as she delves into her research on early African American women's clubs and the remarkable women who led these organizations right here in Grand Rapids.

### Black History Live with Culture Queen

Saturday, February 22  
11:00 am – 12:00 pm Main Library

Black History Live with Culture Queen is an immersive and engaging performance designed for children, combining original, interactive music, movement, and storytelling to help them embrace their history and love themselves. Designed for ages 6–13.

Culture Queen's captivating personality and creative approach to cultural education invites children to celebrate everything that makes them unique. By the end, kids will leave with a newfound confidence, cultural pride, and curiosity about the world, proudly declaring, "I Like The Me I See!"

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation and the Wege Foundation for their support of these programs.

# Events for Everyone

## FOR KIDS

### Meet Me at the Library

*Saturdays, January 18 – April 5*  
10:30 am – 1:00 pm

Ottawa Hills, Seymour, Yankee Clipper,  
& West Side

It's a play date at the library! Drop by for family-friendly fun and refreshments. Bring your friends or make some new ones at these weekly neighborhood parties featuring toys, games, and music. Designed for ages 0–5.



### Tails & Tales: Read to Therapy Dogs

Literacy is a fundamental skill that takes practice. In this program, kids are invited to practice reading to a licensed therapy dog from West Michigan Therapy Dogs Ruff Readers!

Attendees will be able to read to a therapy dog for 10–15 minutes. While kids wait for their chance to read, the library will provide a small craft or activity. Reading spots with dogs are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Designed for ages 6–13.

*Mondays, February 10, March 10, April 14*  
6:00 – 7:00 pm Yankee Clipper

*Wednesdays, February 26, March 26, April 23*  
6:00 – 7:00 pm Ottawa Hills

### Library Hangouts

Drop by the library for activities designed for kids. Bring friends or make new ones at this weekly event series. Light snacks and refreshments will be provided. Designed for ages 6–13.

*Mondays, January 6 – April 14*  
3:00 – 5:00 pm West Leonard

*Wednesdays, January 8 – April 16*  
3:00 – 5:00 pm Van Belkum

## FOR TEENS

### Dungeons & Dragons for Teens

*Thursdays, February 6, March 6, April 3*  
4:00 – 7:00 pm Main Library

Want to try Dungeons & Dragons but don't know where to start? Already love D&D but don't have a party? Come to the library for monthly drop-in sessions, open to players of all skill levels.

You don't need to commit to multiple sessions. And like any good D&D session, we will have snacks. Bring your own character or get a premade one from us. Space is limited and first come, first served. Designed for ages 11–18.

### Teen Anime Club

*Tuesdays, February 11, 25, March 11, 25,*  
*April 8, 22*

4:00 – 5:30 pm Madison Square

*Thursdays, February 6, 20, March 6, 20,*  
*April 3, 17*

4:30 – 6:00 pm West Side

Join Teen Anime Club to chat with other enthusiasts about your favorite anime and manga! Chat about what you're currently reading and watch anime episodes together! Snacks are provided and attendees can enter a drawing to win a prize. Designed for teens ages 13–19.

## FOR ALL AGES



### Community Game Night

*Wednesdays, February 19, March 19, April 16*  
5:30 – 7:30 pm Ottawa Hills

Join us for a night of board game fun! The library will provide a variety of games for community members, families, and friends to play. Attendees are welcome to bring their own board games. Light snacks and refreshments will be provided. Designed for all ages.

### Chess Lessons

The sessions will be led by Michael Brooks, President of the Grand Rapids Chess Center. Designed for ages 11 and up.

### Learning the Basics

*Friday, March 7*  
3:30 – 4:30 pm Main Library

Learn the basics of chess, like the meaning and purpose of each piece on a chess board. Attendees will leave with knowledge of simple moves that can be used during casual play.

### Intermediate Skills

*Friday, March 14*  
3:30 – 4:30 pm Main Library

This class is welcome to all skill levels but is geared towards those with a beginner's knowledge of chess. Join us to gain an understanding of chess openings and the middle game.

### Advanced Skills

*Friday, March 21*  
3:30 – 4:30 pm Main Library

In this class, we will discuss closings, time controls, and the structure of tournaments. This class is perfect for players with a solid understanding of chess, including established players and those interested in joining our tournament.

### Chess Tournament

*Friday, March 28*  
11:00 am – 3:00 pm Main Library

Join us at the library for a friendly chess tournament! The morning features a beginners tournament, while the afternoon offers an advanced tournament for those aiming to be crowned the best in the city.

### The Power of Poetry Showcase

*Sunday, April 6*  
2:00 – 4:00 pm Main Library

In this celebratory event hosted by the Grand Rapids Poet Laureate, Christine Stephens-Krieger, attendees will enjoy original performances by local poets including: Greg Bliss, Donna Munro, Foster aka AutoPilot, Mursalata Muhammad, and W. Todd Kaneko.

In addition to the performance, attendees will leave with a recommended reading list and tips on how to enjoy and experience the power of poetry. Designed for all ages.

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation—Dyer-Ives Foundation Poetry Fund for their support of this program.

### Friends of the Library Book Sale

*Saturday, April 26 – Sunday, April 27*  
Main Library – 111 Library St NE

Join us at our biggest book sale of the year! Both cash and credit cards are accepted at this event. All proceeds benefit the Grand Rapids Public Library.

*Saturday, April 26, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm*  
All books are 50 cents each.

*Sunday, April 27, 1:00 – 4:00 pm*  
Fill a bag for \$5.00. Paper bags are provided by the library.

This event is presented by the Friends of the Grand Rapids Public Library.

## FOR ADULTS



### Michigan Author Series: Meryl Wilsner

*Thursday, February 6*  
7:00 – 8:30 pm Main Library

Join us for a conversation with Meryl Wilsner, author of *Something to Talk About*, *Mistakes Were Made*, and *Cleat Cute*. Their queer romance novels have gained widespread media attention for their use of traditional romantic tropes from a queer perspective.

A book signing will follow the event and limited copies will be available for sale at the event.

### 125 Years of the YWCA

*Thursday, March 27*  
6:30 – 7:30 pm Main Library

Join us as Julie Tabberer, head of the Grand Rapids History Center, shares how Helen Claytor's leadership and activism transformed the YWCA from a place where women could have lunch together without being escorted by a man to an organization committed to eliminating racism and empowering women and girls.

This event is presented by the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council, the YWCA, and the Grand Rapids Public Library.

For more events, visit [www.grpl.org/events](http://www.grpl.org/events).

# Storytimes



## Baby & Me

Bring your baby and bounce along to fun stories, songs, and rhymes. Baby & Me is a 15-minute storytime followed by a relaxed playtime where you and baby will meet new friends. For ages 0 – 18 months.

*Tuesdays, January 14 – April 1*  
10:30 am Main Library

*Thursdays, January 16 – April 3*  
10:30 am Seymour

*Fridays, January 17 – April 4*  
10:30 am Van Belkum

## Toddler Time

Bring your toddlers to share fun stories, songs, and rhymes and learn together! Toddler Time is a 25-minute long storytime followed by a hands-on activity and playtime designed to help your child's brain grow. For ages 18 months – 3 years.

*Tuesdays, January 14 – April 1*  
10:30 am West Side

*Thursdays, January 16 – April 3*  
10:30 am Yankee Clipper

## Bilingual Family Time

Join us for a bilingual storytime filled with fun stories, movement, and music activities. The 30-minute English and Spanish storytime is followed by a hands-on activity and playtime. For families with children ages 0 – 5 years.

*Tuesdays, January 14 – April 1*  
10:30 am Madison Square

## Family Storytime

These storytimes feature great books, songs, fingerplays, and hands-on fun. Classes end with an art activity and playtime designed to help your child's brain grow. For ages 0 – 5 years old.

*Mondays, January 13 – March 31*  
10:30 am Main Library

*Wednesdays, January 15 – April 2*  
10:30 am Seymour

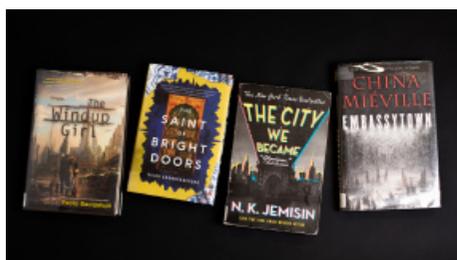
*Fridays, January 17 – April 4*  
10:30 am Ottawa Hills

## Pajama Time

Get cozy in your pajamas, grab your favorite stuffed animals or blanket, and come to the library for a special bedtime event! Listen to stories, sing songs, and get those wiggles out before bed. Great for working parents and caregivers! For ages 0 – 5 years.

*Mondays, January 13 – March 31*  
6:30 pm West Leonard

# Book Clubs



## Sci-Fi Book Club

*Wednesdays, February 5, March 5, April 2*  
7:00 – 8:00 pm Main Library

Join other science-fiction readers for a book club led by GRPL staff. Participate in a discussion about each book with members of the community. This book club is designed for adults.

February 5: *The City We Became*  
by N.K. Jemisin

March 5: *The Saint of Bright Doors*  
by Vajra Chandrasekera

April 2: *The Windup Girl*  
by Paolo Bacigalupi



## Popular Pages Book Club

Join us for our monthly book club! Enjoy popular fiction and nonfiction titles selected by GRPL librarians and participate in a discussion about each reading with members of the community and library staff. This book club is designed for adults and is a great way to meet new friends, explore real and imagined worlds, and discover new perspectives.

## Popular Pages at Yankee Clipper

*Mondays, February 17, March 17, April 21*  
6:00 – 7:00 pm Yankee Clipper

February 17: *The World According to Fannie Davis*  
by Bridgett Davis

March 17: *The Rabbit Hutch* by Tess Gunty

April 21: *I'm Sorry I'm Late, I Didn't Want to Come*  
by Jessica Pan

## Popular Pages at Ottawa Hills

*Wednesdays, February 12, March 12, April 9*  
6:00 – 7:00 pm Ottawa Hills

February 12: *The Vanishing Half*  
by Brit Bennett

March 12: *The Radium Girls* by Kate Moore

April 9: *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro

## Popular Pages at the Main Library

*Saturdays, February 8, March 8, April 5*  
12:00 – 1:00 pm Main Library

February 8: *Men We Reaped: A Memoir*  
by Jesmyn Ward

March 8: *Once There Were Wolves*  
by Charlotte McConaghy

April 5: *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*  
by Joan Didion

# Classes

## Open Lab: Walk-in Technology Help

Need help with your computer, laptop, or smartphone? Have questions about email, the Internet, or the library's digital resources? Stop by during our drop-in sessions and library staff will help answer your basic technology questions.

*Wednesdays, January 8 – April 30*

11:00 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

*Tuesdays, February 4, March 4, April 1*

3:00 – 5:00 pm Yankee Clipper

*Thursdays, February 20, March 20, April 17*

3:00 – 5:00 pm Seymour

## Managing Your Digital Footprint

*Thursday, January 30*

*Monday, March 24*

11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

Have you ever forgotten a password? Do you wish you had a plan to manage your online information and protect your privacy? Managing your digital footprint may seem hard, but with a plan and the right tools you can stay safe online. This class will offer methods and tools to manage your online profiles and passwords.

## Building Basic Computer Skills

*Monday, March 3*

11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

Are you often confused by computer terms and lingo? In this class, you will gain skills to help you start navigating the Internet, mobile devices, and many types of software. Learn basic terminology used in technology to build a foundation for digital literacy.

## Discovering the Internet

*Monday, March 20*

11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

Using the Internet can be an intimidating experience for many people. In this class, you will learn how the Internet works and basic definitions for the most common Internet terms. Discover tips and tricks on how to protect your information and identity while searching, shopping, and browsing the web.

## Exploring Email

*Monday, March 17*

11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

The Internet is always evolving and developing new services and functions. But as services and social networks have come and gone, email has remained constant. In this class, you will explore how to secure your email account and regain access if you forget your password. You will also discover how to use two-factor authentication to protect your accounts.

## Internet Privacy: Protecting Yourself in the Digital Age

*Thursday, February 6*

*Monday, April 7*

11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

Join us in learning how to secure information and manage your digital footprint. Topics include securing your Internet connection and browser, creating and managing effective passwords, and using email aliases to keep your information more secure.

## Backup Basics: How to Secure Your Data

*Thursday, February 13*

*Monday, April 14*

11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

From family photos to business documents, your digital data is valuable. In this class, we discuss how to ensure your digital data is kept safe and secure. Learn how to back up your data with thumb drives, hard drives, and cloud storage.

## Google Drive Basics: Google Docs

*Monday, February 20*

*Wednesday, April 21*

11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

Cloud storage services like Google Drive allow you to store and edit documents online. These documents can be accessed or edited on any device with an Internet connection. In this class, we will discuss how to create, edit, and share word processing files.

## Google Drive Basics: Google Sheets

*Thursday, February 27*

*Monday, April 28*

11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

Cloud storage services like Google Drive allow you to store and edit documents online. These documents can be accessed or edited on any device with an Internet connection. In this class, we will learn how to create, edit, and share spreadsheets.

## Board of Library Commissioners

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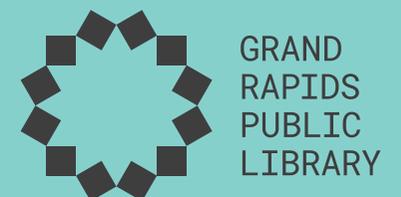
Bryan Holt

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## Library Director

John J. McNaughton



# Competition

## 57th Annual Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition

The Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition was started in 1968 by poet James Allen at the urging of John Hunting, the founder of the Dyer-Ives Foundation, to encourage excellence in writing and to provide recognition for local work of high quality. The annual contest is open to poets ages 5 through adults who reside in Kent County.

Submissions are open February 1–28, 2025. Winners selected in different categories have their poems published in *Voices*, receive a cash award, and participate in a reading in June.

This program is supported by the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation, Dyer-Ives Foundation Poetry Fund.

Support library events.  
Donate today.



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

Grand Rapids  
Public Library  
Foundation



January 2025 | Section B

New Assistant Superintendent: 15

Rosa Parks Essay Contest Winners: 19



## Scholars Excel in First-Ever Ottawa Gauntlet Life Skills Competition

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Ottawa Hills High School celebrated the conclusion of its inaugural Ottawa Gauntlet, a ground-breaking multi-round life skills competition designed to help scholars develop essential soft skills.

A total of 29 scholars took part in the program, which featured a series of challenges aimed at fostering personal and professional growth. After three rounds of rigorous competition, the field was narrowed to four exceptional finalists.

Sanaya Thompson, a junior at Ottawa Hills High School, has been awarded the \$5,000 First Place Scholarship. Three other finalists also earned scholarships, each receiving \$2,000: sophomore Justin Hendricks and juniors Nusra Juma and Tanel Quinones. These scholarships were made possible through the generous support of donors, including New York Life and Prosper Financial Group. Recipients can apply the scholarship funds to the college or trade school of their choice, opening doors to their future educational and career aspirations.

The Ottawa Gauntlet challenged participants to demonstrate 14 critical traits, including common sense, confidence, compassion, humility, and respect. The competition featured creative role-playing scenarios designed to simulate real-world experiences, such as making an elevator pitch, accepting an award, working at a coffee shop, participating in a talk show, and hosting a cooking show.

“It’s really a good thing to do because it helps you, like in the world when you have to make big choices,” Thompson explained of the competition.

“The biggest takeaway was to make connections,” Quinones said. “That is a good way to build your confidence. You get to meet a lot of great people that are willing to help you go through this challenge.”

“Our students here at Ottawa Hills don’t always get a chance to show what they’ve got,” Ottawa Hills High School Art Teacher Jennifer Sharp said. She helped to organize the Ottawa Gauntlet. “I want them to be seen. They’re the future and I think people need to know.”

## From Creek to Capitol: Aberdeen Scholars Push for Michigan’s State Insect

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Scholars at Aberdeen Academy are asking lawmakers to solve a problem – Michigan’s lack of an official state insect.

Ms. Emma Witkovsky’s fifth-grade class invited Rep. Rachel Hood, who represents the Aberdeen neighborhood in the Michigan House of Representatives, to see a presentation on Dec. 6 on why the stonefly should receive the honor.

“The stonefly detects if our water is clean or dirty,” Aberdeen scholar Jamari Lambert explained. “If you don’t see stoneflies, it’s not good.”

“I started making a book that had just some basic information, when I got to Michigan, I realized there wasn’t a state insect,” Witkovsky said about the origin of her advocacy. She realized it was a perfect opportunity for her scholars to learn about nature and politics. “They can be scientists, they can test water quality, they can become a representative. They can write laws themselves. And it’s just empowering them to be better than what they were yesterday.”

During the 2023-24 school year, Rep. Hood introduced House Bill No. 5563 to designate the stonefly as Michigan’s official state insect, inspired by a campaign led by Witkovsky’s class. The class also presented their findings to the Grand Rapids Board of Education.

Although the bill is still awaiting a hearing from lawmakers, Witkovsky’s current class has taken up the mantle, continuing the advocacy with renewed determination.

“This is an important skill that these young people will be able to take forward into their entire lives,” Rep. Hood explained. “They’ll know how to make change in their communities as a result of going through this process.”

If the bill is passed by the state house committee, it will head to the House of Representatives for a vote.

“I’m so proud of us for doing all of this stuff to make a law,” Jamari exclaimed.



## GRPS Announces Hiring of New Assistant Superintendent

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Grand Rapids Public Schools is pleased to announce the hiring of Michelle Dexter as the new Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources.

Ms. Dexter joins GRPS with two decades of experience in human resources and educational leadership. She currently serves as the Executive Director of Human Resources for Swartz Creek Community Schools, located on the east side of the state.

"Ms. Dexter brings a wealth of expertise and a passion for supporting educators and staff in their critical work with students," said GRPS Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby. "Her leadership will be invaluable as we continue our work to retain our incredible staff members and attract new members to Team GRPS."

Ms. Dexter will start her position in January 2025. Please join us in welcoming her to the GRPS community!



*"I am both humbled and honored by my selection to serve as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources for Grand Rapids Public Schools," Dexter said. "I am looking forward to collaborating with the team of leaders as we work to continue to partner with members of the community, business and industry, and other interested stakeholders to identify and select qualified individuals to serve the scholars of the district."*

– Michelle Dexter



## Board of Education Approves Shift in Facility Plan Timeline

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- The Grand Rapids Board of Education approved a shift in the Reimagine GRPS Facility Plan timeline on Monday night. Alger Middle School's relocation to Ottawa Hills High School will be delayed by one year to the 2026-27 school year. Consequently, Brookside Elementary School's move to the renovated Alger site will also be postponed one year to the 2027-28 school year.

The GRPS administrative team, in conjunction with school leaders, recommended this shift to ensure that the planned merger is successful for our scholars and staff.

GRPS is deeply proud of the growth happening at both Ottawa Hills High School and Alger Middle School. Staffing numbers are at levels not seen in more than a decade. Several new programs and initiatives have launched, creating new opportunities for our scholars. GRPS leaders believe an additional school year of continued culture-building will create a more successful joining of the two school communities.

With this new approved timeline, the renovations planned to convert the Alger building into an elementary school will happen while the school is empty during the

2026-27 school year. This means Brookside Elementary scholars and staff will now move into their new home for the 2027-28 school year, one year later than previously planned.

With this timeline adjustment, two other projects will happen earlier than expected.

Renovations at Kent Hills Elementary School, GRPS' fastest-growing school in the district, will now be completed in 2026, one year earlier than previously planned. Renovations at Kent Hills include bathroom improvements, lighting upgrades, and building finishes.

Renovations to the City High Middle School Performing Arts Center will also be completed in 2026, one year earlier than previously planned. This will be the third performing arts center renovation completed as part of the Reimagine GRPS Bond, following projects at Innovation Central High School and Ottawa Hills High School expected to be completed in 2025.

You can find an overview of all projects in the Reimagine GRPS Facility Plan anytime on our website.

## Grand Rapids Public Schools

**WE ARE GR**

January 2025  
Grand Rapids  
Board of Education

*Kymerlie Davis, President*  
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*Superintendent of Schools*

Equal Opportunity Institution: Grand Rapids Public Schools, as an Equal Opportunity Institution, complies with federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment, including Title IV and Title VII (with amendments) of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Title IX of the Educational Amendment of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Veterans Readjustment Act of 1974 as amended 38 USC 20-12 and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990. The District will not discriminate against any person based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and expression, height, weight, color, religion, national origin, age, marital status, pregnancy, disability or veteran status. The District's Civil Rights Compliance Officer is Anya Lusk. Ms. Lusk may be contacted at 1331 Martin Luther King Jr. St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, (616) 819-2030 or (616) 819-2028. The District's Title IX Coordinator is Kurt Johnson. Mr. Kurt Johnson may be contacted at 1331 Martin Luther King Jr. St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49501 or (616) 819-6339 or [titleix@grps.org](mailto:titleix@grps.org).

Title IX Annual Athletics Compliance Report: Grand Rapids Public Schools is committed to securing athletic equity and provides annual Title IX reporting to the athletes and parents in an effort to bring increased attention and resources towards ensuring that gender equity as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments for 1972, Grand Rapids Public Schools annual report is available at [www.grps.org](http://www.grps.org).

To comply with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), parents may request information regarding the professional qualifications of the student's classroom teachers.

Please contact Christi Atwood, Director of Human Resources, in Human Resources via email [atwoodc@grps.org](mailto:atwoodc@grps.org) or at (616) 819-2095.

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## Tackling the Teacher Shortage: GRPS Launches *Grow Your Own* Program

Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) is proud to announce the launch of the 'Grow Your Own' Program, an innovative initiative that provides district employees with a completely cost-free pathway to becoming fully certified teachers. Thanks

to a state-funded grant, the program covers 100% of tuition, books, and fees for eligible participants, allowing them to enroll in Davenport University's Alternative Route to Teacher Certification program for free.

This unique partnership enables GRPS employees to complete their graduate program and teaching certification process entirely online, while continuing to work in their current roles within the district. Successful participants of the GRPS Grow Your Own program will earn their teaching credentials and become fully certified teachers in just one year.

As part of the College of Urban Education, Davenport's Alternative Route to Teacher Certification program empowers their students with the knowledge, skills, and training needed to meet the unique needs of scholars within urban school districts. Program participants will be fully equipped with the mentorship, support, and resources they need to succeed in both the graduate program and as new GRPS Teachers.

## Open to All GRPS Employees

The 'Grow Your Own' Program is available to all current GRPS employees with a Bachelor's degree - including paraprofessionals, substitutes, contractors, and other essential staff members.

The 'Grow Your Own' Program offers more than just a free route to teacher certification—it is an investment in the career growth of GRPS employees and the success of GRPS scholars. The program is designed to create a strong, homegrown talent pool of educators who are deeply invested in the success of GRPS students and the growth of the district.

## Apply Today!

Several program participants have already begun their journey in the January 2025 cohort, and applications are still open for the Fall 2025 cohort.

To learn more about the GRPS Grow Your Own program, eligibility, and how to apply, visit [grps.org/gyo](https://grps.org/gyo)



## GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOLS EXPO & INFORMATION FAIR

**JANUARY 29, 2025**  
**4:30 – 6:30 PM**  
**GRPS University**

1400 Fuller Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505

**GRPS EXPO**  
[grps.org/expo](https://grps.org/expo)

## Summer Programming Set to Launch at Grand Rapids Public Schools

At Grand Rapids Public Schools, we want our scholars to enjoy their summer by exploring, learning, playing, and growing! That's where Ignite: Summer Learning at GRPS comes in! The 6-week summer program for currently enrolled GRPS scholars in grades K-8 is intended to boost scholars' academic understanding and provide fun summer experiences through partnerships with local organizations. GRPS also offers support for high schoolers seeking to recover credits.

Summer programming for scholars will be hosted at five summer sites:

- Burton Elementary/Middle School
- Gerald R. Ford Academic Center
- Harrison Park Academy
- North Park Montessori
- Southwest Middle High (grades 9-12 only)

Schools will send registration information to their scholars by mail and email. Registration is open from January 27 to March 14. Visit [grps.org/summer](https://grps.org/summer) for more information!



### K-8 Ignite Program:

June 16 - July 24, 2025  
 Monday - Thursday  
 8:00 AM - 12:30 PM  
 (No school June 19)

### 9-12 Ignite Program:

June 16 - July 24, 2025  
 Monday - Thursday  
 7:30 AM - 12:45 PM  
 (No school June 19)

# 2025 FAFSA WORKSHOPS



Grand Rapids  
**Promise Zone**

## FAFSA WORKSHOP DATES ANNOUNCED!

Grand Rapids Public Schools and the Grand Rapids Promise Zone are teaming up to host multiple workshops for high school seniors in the coming months as they prepare for college.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a crucial step for high school seniors embarking on their journey to higher education. FAFSA is an essential tool in alleviating the financial burden of college education. It serves as the gateway to federal grants, loans, and work-study programs, providing financial assistance to students and making college more accessible.

During the workshops, experienced advisors will be available to guide scholars and their families through the application, ensuring they maximize their eligibility for financial aid. Attending a FAFSA Workshop is a proactive step toward securing the necessary resources for a successful college experience.

### January 22 | 5 - 7 p.m.

Union High School  
-Union families only  
-Translation services available in Kinyarwanda, Spanish & Swahili

### January 23 | 6 - 7:30 p.m.

Innovation Central High School  
-Translation services available in Spanish & Kinyarwanda

### January 30 | 5 - 7 p.m.

Grand Rapids Public Museum High School  
-Translation services available in Spanish

### February 4 | 4 - 7 p.m.

CA Frost Middle/High School

### February 5 | 5 - 7 p.m.

Grand Rapids Public Museum High School  
-Translation services available in Spanish

### February 6 | 3:30 - 5 p.m.

Southeast Career Pathways  
-SECP families only

### February 12 | 5 - 7 p.m.

Union High School  
-Union families only  
-Translation services available in Kinyarwanda, Spanish & Swahili

### February 18 | 5 - 7 p.m.

Paul I. Phillips Boys and Girls Club

### February 20 | 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Ottawa Hills High School

### February 27 | 4 - 8 p.m.

CA Frost Middle/High School

### March 5 | 5 - 7 p.m.

Southwest Middle High School - Academia Bilingüe  
-Translation services available in Spanish

### March 20 | 12:30 - 2:30 p.m.

Ottawa Hills High School  
-Ottawa Hills families only



## PRINCIPAL PROFILE

### Troy Wilbon Helps Scholars Shape Their Futures by Empowering Pathways

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) — Troy Wilbon, Principal at Southeast Career Pathways, has dedicated his life to helping young people succeed both in and out of the classroom.

Reflecting on his career, Wilbon recalls his early days as Dean at Creston High School, where he first learned the value of truly knowing scholars.

“Being a Dean, you have a lot of interactions with the students, just getting to know who they are,” he said. This approach continued when he became Principal at Creston and later at Harrison Park Academy.

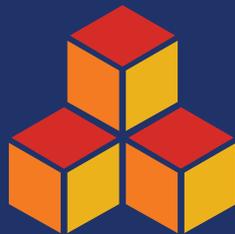
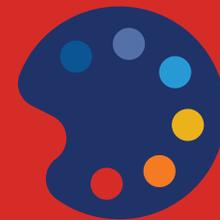
A longtime coach, Wilbon sees parallels between coaching and his work in education.

“As a coach, it’s really about putting people in the right position to be successful. You have to focus on who it is that you’re trying to help and what their end goal is,” he explained.

Wilbon’s work at Southeast Career Pathways focuses on helping scholars find their own way.

“I tell most scholars you don’t have to go to college right away, but if you get your high school diploma, at least you now have options,” he shared. “We all learn differently and when you have multiple scholars coming from all over the city, you really have to understand each individual scholar. I think that’s what really helps our success here at Southeast.”

# APPLY TODAY TO A GRPS THEME SCHOOL!



The Theme School Application is *OPEN* for the 2025-2026 school year. Scan the QR code to learn more about the Theme School Application process and apply today!

## Our Theme Schools



**Grand Rapids Public Schools**

(616) 819-2150 | enrollment@grps.org | apply.grps.org

Community & Student Services | 1331 Martin Luther King Jr St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506



GRPS CHAMPIONS

### Coach Ceglarek Having an Impact in the Classroom and On the Field

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Union High School math teacher and JV football head coach Colson Ceglarek is making his mark both in the classroom and on the field.

A native of West Michigan, Ceglarek joined Grand Rapids Public Schools with a commitment to building a strong, supportive environment for students and peers alike.

“I grew up in West Michigan and knew I wanted to stay in the area,” Ceglarek shared. “I chose GRPS specifically because I believe the culture, climate, and community are superior to other schools in the area. From the first interview, I felt welcomed and encouraged to begin my career, and I could not be happier with where I am.”

Since joining GRPS, Ceglarek has embraced his role at Union High School wholeheartedly, participating in a wide array of activities beyond teaching math. From coaching JV and Varsity football, leading the 7th and 8th-grade football teams, subbing in classrooms, and even attending music and JROTC events, Ceglarek takes every opportunity to connect with scholars.

“Being present, I believe, helps me develop those relationships with the students,” he said. “Creating those relationships builds the culture and optimism we need in our community.”

Ceglarek’s approach reflects his belief in the power of community and highlights the positive impact a dedicated teacher and coach can have on school culture. His commitment to Union High School exemplifies the GRPS spirit, providing scholars with an educator who is not only passionate about teaching but also deeply invested in their personal growth and success.



### GRPS Scholars Honored In Rosa Parks Essay Contest

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Four GRPS scholars were awarded prizes by the Rosa Parks Education Committee in the Rosa Parks Essay Contest.

Alea Fitzpatrick, a scholar at Union High School, was awarded the \$500 first-place prize in the 11th and 12th grade division. Fitzpatrick’s essay was titled “My Motivation.” Kamora Price, a scholar at Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy, was awarded the \$200 third-place prize for her essay titled, “A World with Equity.”

Rebecca Barnes, a scholar at CA Frost Environmental Science Middle High

School, was awarded the \$300 second-place prize in the 9th and 10th grade division. Her essay was titled “Walking the Paths of Justice.” Sage Saunders, a scholar at City High Middle School, was awarded the \$200 third-place prize for her essay titled, “Day by Day.”

The Rosa Parks Sculpture Education Committee, in partnership with the City of Grand Rapids Community Relations Commission and the City of Grand Rapids Office of Equity and Engagement, sponsor the contest to remember and honor the courage that Mrs. Rosa Parks exhibited on December 1, 1955, by refusing to give up

her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

The Committee invited high school students in Grand Rapids to reflect on this year’s essay theme of “Riding with Mrs. Parks” and write an essay expressing how they would fight for justice alongside of Rosa Parks. A panel of the Rosa Parks Education Committee scored the essay submissions and selected the winners.

The Rosa Parks Education Committee includes representatives from the City of Grand Rapids, Community Relations Commission, Kent ISD, Mercantile Bank and Our Community’s Children.

### GRPS Scholars Explore HBCUs to Prepare for Success Beyond Graduation



GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Several Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) scholars have visited Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to learn more about additional opportunities following high school graduation.

GRPS led recent trips to multiple schools, including Central State University, Wilberforce University, Kentucky State University, Tuskegee University, and Simmons College of Kentucky. Scholars have also visited HBCU expos in Chicago and Detroit.

GRPS also partnered with Jash’d Belcher of HBCU Power to expose scholars to multi-week on-campus learning experiences at Spelman College during summer break.

If you are a GRPS scholar interested in learning more about opportunities to visit HBCUs, contact Sherrie Ross: [rosss@grps.org](mailto:rosss@grps.org).

# SENIOR SHOWCASE

Throughout the school year, we'll be sharing #GRPSSeniorShowcase videos to celebrate our incredible seniors. Stay tuned for more inspiring stories from the Class of 2025!



## Museum High Senior Says "hands-on learning has prepared me for what's next"

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Meet Ja'Ron LaGrone, a senior at Museum High School, who is excited to pursue a career in zoology. He credits Museum High's hands-on learning and project-based approach for giving him the skills and confidence he needs to succeed.

"I think it has helped me a lot having more hands-on learning with a lot of projects. The communications that I've developed through working with people will definitely help me."



## CA Frost Senior Determined to "better the world"

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Meet Olivia Gaudet, a senior at CA Frost Environmental Science Middle High School. After graduation she plans to earn a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, with a specialization in environmental sciences.

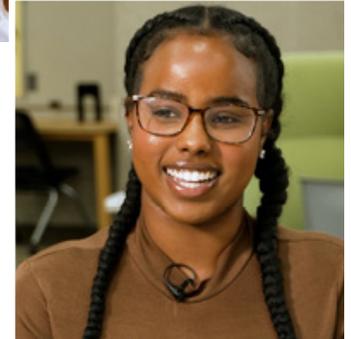
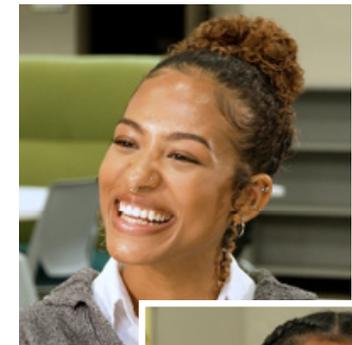
"One thing that I feel like has always been true for me is that I have been driven by a need to know as much as I can about the world around me," Gaudet explained. "By understanding things I am able to help in what ways that I can."



## Leadership Experiences Pave Future for Union Scholar

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Meet Ja'Koveon Perkins, a senior at Union High School. During his time at Union, Perkins has participated in multiple leadership opportunities including Michigan Youth in Government and Student Council.

"Getting to meet new people from different backgrounds, it gives me a sense of security, knowing that I could go to other people and talk to them and get different insights," Perkins explained. "I'm planning on going to college to pursue a bachelor's degree in business."



## City High Middle Duo Started Black Student Alliance

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Meet Imara Skyers and Anna Wetzel, seniors at City High Middle School. The two started the Black Student Alliance (BSA) at City High Middle, an afterschool club that meets weekly.

"Anna is very hard working," Skyers said of her classmate. "She balances social life, school life, and work life. Anytime I see her, she's always working. She has her laptop open, doing work."

"Imara has many creative characteristics that I wish I had," Wetzel said. "The talent that she has artistically - I love admiring it."



## GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2025 Graduation Schedule

HOSTED AT HOUSEMAN FIELD

### Monday, May 19, 2025

- 5:00 PM: CA Frost Middle High School
- 7:00 PM: Union High School

### Tuesday, May 20, 2025

- 5:00 PM: Southwest Middle High School
- 7:00 PM: Innovation Central High School and Grand Rapids Montessori High School

### Wednesday, May 21, 2025

- 5:00 PM: Ottawa Hills High School
- 7:00 PM: Grand Rapids Public Museum School

### Thursday, May 22, 2025

- 5:00 PM: Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy
- 7:00 PM: City High Middle School

### Wednesday, May 28, 2025

- 6:00 PM: Grand Rapids Learning Center (Ceremony will be held at GRCC Spectrum Theater)