



2017 KALAMAZOO AREA

Excellence in Education

Student Comments on Significant Educators

Luke Swager



Mr. Swager has been a mentor for me since the age of 5. He has been my softball coach since tee-ball and is my best friend's father, so he acted as a kind of second dad. He has taught me to put 100% of my effort into all that I do, has taught me to be confident, but humble as well, and has supported me throughout the years.

- McKenzie Hennessy

Elizabeth O'Brien



Ms. O'Brien saw the potential in me that no other teacher did. She recognized my capabilities as an honor student and because of this I was able to excel academically.

- Michaela Kessler

Scott Friesner



Undeniably, the curriculum offered through the Academically Talented Youth Program English is special. What makes the experience stellar, however, lies in the genuine passion of its instructors. Throughout the year I shared with Mr. Friesner, I was taught not only to analyze texts, but also to examine and reflect upon life through literature. His resounding confidence in my abilities brought me to approach my work with exuberance and fostered an ongoing quest for deeper truths, now and in my future.

- Vincent McNelis

Charlene Dailey



Besides being an excellent Chemistry teacher and role model, Charlene Dailey has gone beyond her job requirements to help, not only me but multiple students, reach their highest potential inside and outside of the classroom. She pushes students to go beyond the bare necessities to build life skills and always offers companionship. She provides outlets for her students to explore their academic interests and is always there for anything her students might need.

- Freddie Ouding

Anne Quartermaine



I have had Mrs. Q for the past two years in Algebra II and Trigonometry. She not only is a great teacher by making difficult subjects easy to understand, but she also is more than willing to take the time to get to know each individual student. By doing this I think she has a better understanding of what the students strengths and weaknesses are. She is always willing to stay after school or come in early and help any students who need additional help. During our class, Mrs. Q takes the time to explain concepts thoroughly. She also allows students to interact with her and other classmates to help understand the concepts better. Mrs. Q has a way of letting students show their true potential.

- Natalie Hosmer

Ashley Copp



Mrs. Copp was my seventh and eighth grade advanced English teacher, but I learned so much more than English from her. I developed confidence, an open mind, creativity, and a drive for my own personal education that have impacted how I respond to challenges in high school and extracurricular activities today. She organized a variety of activities related to each topic we learned, pushing us to critically think about connections from the literature we read to cultures, social situations, and historical elements that impact the world we see everyday. (1/2)

Ashley Copp



She also took a personal approach to our learning that stands out in the educational field. Mrs. Copp recognized us not only as students, but as kids who were still learning about ourselves. From daily conversation topics to in depth discussions about our material, she encouraged a healthy risk-taking atmosphere in the classroom and among peers. What she taught has stuck with my classmates and I for the last five years, and we often find ourselves reminiscing, “remember that one time in Mrs. Copp's class?”(2/2)

- Keziah Claussen

Matthew Hawkins



Mr. Hawkins has been present in my life since 6th grade and very few others have touched my life in the way he has. He has given me constant encouragement in the areas he knows matter deeply to me and never fails to remind me that I do not have to be perfect at everything to be someone of worth. I have looked forward to every track practice I have shared with him (yes, even the 2 minute drills) because while he drives me to be a better athlete, he also drives me to be a better individual in all aspects of my life. (1/2)

Matthew Hawkins



I have been so lucky to have gotten to know Mr. Hawkins as well as I have, and I will always appreciate the impact he has had on my life. He never fails to remind me that I do not have to be perfect at everything to be someone of worth. I have looked forward to every track practice I have shared with him (yes, even the 2 minute drills) because while he drives me to be a better athlete, he also drives me to be a better individual in all aspects of my life. I have been so lucky to have gotten to know Mr. Hawkins as well as I have and I will always appreciate the impact he has had on my life. (2/2)

- Helen Foldenauer

Julie Jones



I really enjoyed to classes I took with her, and I found the discussions we had in them very engaging. I also appreciate how much she helped me with my college applications, and how much my writing in general improved because of her classes.

- Ashley Korendyke

Bobbi Stoner



Bobbi J. Stoner is more than just my school counselor. She is a mother-like figure and a mentor to me. I am who I am today because of her. She was the first person I met when I moved to Gull Lake High School. She has helped me with my career choices, school work, and most importantly made me a better decision maker. Bobbi J. Stoner is my inspiration and, I can not thank her enough for everything she has done for me. Bobbi Stoner's true guidance is like a small torch in a dark forest that does not show everything at once, but gives enough light for the next step to be safe.

- Krishna Patel

Brad Portis



Mr. Portis has made a tremendous impact on my high school career. I have had the privilege of being a Chemistry student of his for the past three years. My enjoyment for the subject can be attributed to Mr. Portis' passion and enthusiasm for both Chemistry and teaching. From day one, Mr. Portis established a classroom environment that demands hard work and the very best out of each and every one of his students. The combination of his high expectations and stimulating classroom environment has helped me to push myself farther than I ever thought I could go. Through his engaging lectures and rigorous lab work, Mr. Portis has prepared me for both academics and life well beyond my secondary education and has inspired me to go into the field of engineering. I am forever grateful for the knowledge and relentless encouragement he has bestowed upon me.

- Maria Rochow

Katy Briggs



After having Ms. Katy Briggs for English Literature and AP Literature, it is clear to me that she is a superb educator. Ms. Briggs is incredibly knowledgeable about her subject area, making for interesting and engaging lectures. The creativity and passion that Ms. Briggs brings to her classroom fosters a unique learning environment. In my two years of taking classes with Ms. Briggs, I have grown immensely in my writing abilities, and I feel very prepared to take on a college English course. It has been a real privilege to have experienced Ms. Briggs' exceptional teaching and dedication.

- Hope Baldwin

Stacey Koning



Miss Koning has been integral to the development of my writing skills. I used to loathe writing, but once I took her writing class, my love for writing and skill level grew. She has also given me assistance outside of class so I could obtain the best score possible on the ACT. Overall, she is a wonderful teacher with a very organized teaching style, and you can clearly see the love she has for Heritage Christian Academy and her students.

- Elizabeth Carpenter

Joshua Gottlieb



When I walked into Mr. Gottlieb's class on the first day of my junior year, the colorful art and impressive physics projects that decorate his room intrigued me. It didn't take very long for me to tell that Mr. Gottlieb was just as cool a guy. Throughout the year, not only did Mr. Gottlieb truly make physics fun with his arsenal of amazing demonstrations, funny classroom jokes, and spontaneous discourses about the world, but he did everything he could to make us understand it. He pushed us to figure things out by ourselves, but was also there when we absolutely needed guidance. He was extremely passionate about physics, and clearly became a teacher so that he could pass along his love and knowledge of it. In AP Physics this year, he has remained such a witty, humble, firm, and intelligent man. He has done so much more than just teach us the importance and wonder of physics. I will always have fond memories of both laughing and being awestruck with the rest (1/2)

Joshua Gottlieb



of the class in Room 345. I don't just consider Mr. Gottlieb a significant educator of mine; I consider him a master of his trade and one of my favorite teachers of all time. (2/)

- Samuel Canfield

Kari Luckett



Mrs. Luckett is an amazing teacher that challenged me to reach new levels of academic achievement. The rigor of her curriculum was matched only by her availability for help. She was always ready to aid a struggling student after school, and her aptitude for friendliness and patience was remarkable. Mrs. Luckett provided me with a significant educational experience that encouraged me to try new methods of learning and challenge myself. I feel much more prepared for difficult, college classes in the future, and more confident in my abilities as a student, all thanks to the influence of Mrs. Luckett.

- Brandon Howard

Theresa Williams-Johnson



Mrs. Johnson has been my choir director every year since 7th grade. She has been influential in developing my love for music while instilling high expectations that have always kept me motivated. She treats her choirs like family by teaching us how to work together and she brings a passion to the classroom that I hope to have for my future career.

- Madeleine Mozina

Christopher Bullmer



Throughout the past four years, I have had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Bullmer as a teacher and a debate coach. His dedication and consistent effort in order to help all of his students achieve success is amazing. He has not only taught me to be a better student but also a better person. Although I'm not great at English, he has motivated me to be the best that I can be in terms of fully understanding and using language to my potential. He has always provided me with guidance when in need but led me in way that allowed me to find the answers for myself. I cannot thank him enough for his steadfast, unconditional belief in me.

- Subi Thakali

Becky Cooper



I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Cooper as my instructor for my third year at the Academically Talented Youth Program for English studies. I was entering what I believed would be a stressful course, ending with two AP exams and officially concluding my high school English curriculum. The class ended up meaning so much more to me than that. Cooper's class was one of the most interesting and invigorating courses I've ever taken. Not only were the discussions engaging and the essays challenging, but Cooper consistently gave her all to her students and was not just a great instructor, but a confidant. Her kindness and empathy were clear in every conversation we had, and there were no questions too big or too small to be examined. Her impact has truly gone beyond my education and had a positive influence on my view of the world and those around me. I am honored to know her and have her here today.

- Olivia Venus

Rex Hafer



Over the past four years, I have had the privilege of knowing Mr. Rex Hafer as a cross country coach, AP US Government and AP Comparative Government teacher, National Honor Society advisor, and even the sponsor of Kalamazoo Central's chess club, but his impact on my life reaches past the realms of running, government, community service, and chess. He has provided critical life lessons both within and independently of these activities, lessons that have made me a stronger, more thoughtful person and a better member of society. (1/2)

Rex Hafer



His support, mentorship, and insight have at times both humbled me and boosted my confidence, both challenged and reaffirmed my principles. In the classroom, on the cross country course, at lunch, or anywhere else, Coach Hafer has always known my potential better than I have, and he has done everything he can to guide me toward reaching it. I have no doubt that what I have learned from him will not only make me more successful in my future endeavors but also result in my actions making the world a better place. (2/2)

- Daniel Whitcomb

Al Nieboer



Mr. Nieboer is a teacher who always expects the best from each and every one of his students. From my first day as a sophomore in his chemistry class, I knew exactly what was expected of me and was provided with the tools and knowledge to get the most out of his class. I am very thankful for his style of teaching as the work ethic he instilled in me carried over into my other classes. Although Mr. Nieboer expects a lot from his students, he also knows how to have fun; whether that is starting out every class with a round of trivia or always having a new pun or catch-phrase to share. He is also the coach of quiz-bowl and TEAMS (technology, engineering, applied math, and science) competitions and gets students excited and interested in the various opportunities that are available in science. I am extremely grateful to him as he helped me discover my desire to go into the engineering field.

- Abigail Dykema

Barbara Felkel



Magistra Felkel has helped me to become excited to come to class every day and study Latin, and encourages me in all steps of my college search and transition. She finds ways to clearly apply our subject matter to every day life in an English-speaking culture, and makes sure that all students have all the tools they need to be adequately prepared to do anything that they need to do. Magistra has fostered an attitude of success in my class and in me.

- Lacey Burke

William Brieger



Mr. Brieger taught my eighth grade English class in the Academically Talented Youth Program. Before attending his class, I struggled with idea generation and analysis of texts; his class developed foundational skills that strengthened my analytic capabilities through engaging, full-class discussion. Mr. Brieger's class was the most challenging class I took throughout my education and spurred mental growth and fortitude, preparing me for the rest of my life.

- Samuel Ratliff

Shannon Houtrouw



Mr. Houtrouw goes beyond the standard qualifications that make a teacher. He strives every day to better equip himself with knowledge so that he can pass it on to his students. It is easy to tell that teaching is his true passion because he gives it his all. Never does his enthusiasm fail to shine and spread to everyone around him. Personally, Mr. Houtrouw has shown me the beauty of Computer Science and made learning fun. Even on days when I doubt myself, Mr. Houtrouw is always there to motivate me and remind me of the goals I desire. He puts his own interests aside so that I can achieve what will make me happy. After spending three years in his classes and on his competitive programming teams, I can safely say that he is not only a mentor to me, but also a friend.

- Vaughn Taylor

Trevor Stefanick



Mr. Stefanick's teaching style truly sparks one's scientific curiosity and incites a deep interest in the natural world. His constant connections to real world phenomenon makes learning easier and more applicable. Mr. Stefanick's continued advice and mentorship have greatly helped me as I have advanced through my high school career.

- Hamza Turkistani

Shannon Houtrouw



Mr. Houtrouw has gone out of his way to help me succeed - it is obvious that he cares about me and that he views teaching as more than just a job. From helping me discover my interest in computer science to setting me up with my first job, he has supported me both inside and outside of the classroom. I would like to thank Mr. Houtrouw for believing in me and for being an awesome teacher.

- Ava Wood

Becky Cooper



Becky Cooper played a very important role in my education and life. She made learning enjoyable, kept me engaged and advanced my interest in English literature and language. The revision process and fast pace forced me to produce better essays in shorter periods of time. She also instilled in me the desire to become a life-long learner. Her influence has had a tremendous impact on my life, and for that, I can't thank her enough.

- Lachlan Woods

Lisa Ouellette



Mrs. Ouellette is a phenomenal teacher who has inspired my pursuit of language arts over the last two years. Each morning I look forward to her light-hearted but thought provoking class which keeps me thinking creatively throughout the day. Thanks Mrs. O! Don't let iced cream get in your back pocket!

- Nathan Fialkoff

Wayne Hinton



Wayne Hinton is my football coach, gym teacher, and weight lifting coach. He has helped shape me into the driven student I am today. He's taught me lessons about being a better son, husband, and father; a better overall man. Because he has taught me about bettering myself and fighting to accomplish my best, I am currently in the top five in my class rank and I've been accepted into the University of Michigan. Much of my success as a student is because of him.

- Robert Miller

Colleen Chapoton



Ms. Chapoton ignited my interest in biology, and encouraged my passion for the subject and love for learning.

- Aheer Alvi

Linda Kozacki



Mrs. Linda Kozacki has been my Varsity Alpine Skiing Coach for four years. In that short period of time, she has taught me more about skiing than I ever hoped to know, but the life lessons she has shared with me extend far beyond the ski slope. I learned that the best way to approach life is through an optimistic attitude, friendly nature, and carefree soul. I am proud to call Linda my coach, but I am even more proud to call her my friend.

- Andrew Backer

Shannon Houtrouw



Mr. Houtrouw is significant to me because he's really helped develop and fuel my passion for technology and computer science. Taking his classes have only affirmed that computer science is what I want to do in life. In addition, outside the classroom he's always taken an interest in my extracurricular activities and in my success as a person. He's the one teacher who I can talk to about almost anything, and who really cares.

- Veronica Buss

Tama Salisbury



From the first day I stepped into her classroom as a sophomore in AP Government, Ms. Salisbury has taught me to be passionate about American politics. As my Extended Essay advisor, she guided me through my research on campaign finance, continuing to encourage my interest in this field. I intend to be involved in politics in some way after college, and I am grateful to Ms. Salisbury for motivating me to pursue this passion.

- William Chung

Kayleen Grand



Mrs. Grand is a very special person, and she has been a major influence on me during my high school years. Because of her, I'm inspired to dream bigger and pursue a career in law and public service, something I would have never imagined four years ago. During my freshman year, she taught Honors Modern American History, and in part because of her passion, I actually enjoyed a history class for the first time. She also served as my yearbook advisor, and as the editor of the yearbook, I could always count on Mrs. Grand to be available and to assist with any request or otherwise guide me in leading our yearbook class to meet our deadlines while also producing yearbooks we can be really proud of. (1/2)

Kayleen Grand



She's not just a teacher or yearbook advisor; she's also been someone whom I can turn to with any problem, personal or school-related. Mrs. Grand's positive attitude, welcoming personality, and ultimately, her faith in me, has made my high school experience truly enjoyable. I will always remember her and her inspiration as I move forward in life and chase my dreams.

- Meghan Ghosh

Shannon Houtrouw



Mr. Houtrouw's dedication to providing me with the best computer science education has provided me with most incredible opportunities. His devotion to helping me achieve my highest potential, both inside and outside the classroom, has driven me to reach greater levels than I ever thought possible. Mr. Houtrouw has shaped my intellectual growth, guiding me through difficult programming problems and difficult college application materials alike, and provided me with true, unconditional support throughout my high school career. Both he himself and the computer science skills he has passed on to me have opened doors that I never could have even imagined and I can't begin to express how grateful I am for that.

- Lily Kitagawa

Cheryl Hach



Ms. Hach has thoroughly prepared me for both the rigor and excitement of college. She has created a fun avenue for learning both organic and bio chemistry for me, and I have enjoyed every moment of her classes. I would not appreciate the world around me as much were it not for her.

- Praneeth Medepalli

Colleen Chapoton



Ms. Chapoton has been an incredible teacher and friend, helping me to be both the best possible student and person I can be. She has taught me how to work hard and never give up on what I believe in. I am incredibly grateful for everything she has done for me, both inside and outside of the classroom.

- Olivia Ballentine

Jeanine Patterson



It's no coincidence that Mrs. Patterson was my teacher at the time that I decided to pursue a career in business. For some reason she took an interest in a “quirky sophomore who was always messing around with Chad and Parker,” and has since encouraged me to strive for excellence in school, DECA, and whatever else I came in early to talk to her about. For the impact she's had on the past few years of my life, as well as my plan for the future, I'm grateful to Mrs. Patterson.

- Isaiah Dykstra

Shannon Houtrouw



I've had Mr. Houtrouw as a teacher for three out of four of my high school years, and he has made every day of class enjoyable. He has made me want to learn more about computers and programming, as well as encouraged me to succeed in all areas of my life. Mr. Houtrouw is a significant educator because he has made a lasting impact on my education by being a supportive and inspiring teacher.

- Claire Holley

Bryan Hill



Senor Hill has been my Spanish teacher for two years. He pushes his students to do their best and makes himself available for any assistance needed. He really engages his students; instead of simply conjugating verbs all class period, most of the time is spent discussing topics ranging from plans for the upcoming weekend to Spanish literature, from the environment to music. His positive attitude and passion for teaching make him 'el mejor maestro' (the best teacher).

- Caroline Jordan

Modhi Alshehri



Mr. Alshehri has been my teacher for three courses at KAMSC: pre-calculus, advanced calculus, and AP physics. These subjects can be challenging but Mr. Alshehri's style of teaching is to give students the tools to figure out really difficult problems on their own. I plan to study engineering at Brown University and I feel like I am better prepared for college-level STEM courses than most students. Instead of just knowing how to plug numbers into equations, I feel that I have a true, fundamental understanding of physics and calculus. Mr. Alshehri teaches some of the most difficult courses at KAMSC and still manages to keep the classes interesting, and is consistently available to provide extra help outside of class. He truly cares about the success of each of his students, and has prepared me to be a successful problem solver in whatever field I choose.

- Lizzie Kimmel

Michael Sinclair



I have had Mr. Sinclair as a teacher for two years. The calculus and physics classes I had with him were enjoyable and very memorable. He has always been there to help and support me throughout my high school endeavors.

- Vivek Parikh

Justin Olsen



Mr. Olsen was my teacher for Chemistry II and IB Physics I. He teaches in a way that makes science interesting and keeps students engaged. I appreciate how Mr. Olsen pushed me to reach my full potential inside the classroom. He also taught me the importance of understanding the underlying concepts of the subject matter rather than simply memorizing facts and formulas. As a result of his teaching, I feel that I have become a better learner who is prepared for the future academic opportunities and challenges I will face in college and throughout my career.

- Adam Schuhknecht

Lori Pelton



Mrs. Pelton really made a difference in my high school career. She always expected the best from me during class. Her classes and her teaching have helped me outside the classroom as well. I have learned so much about how to be employable and professional outside of school. These skills that I have learned from Mrs. Pelton are very applicable to the real world, and have helped me in my job and other classes. I will never forget what I have learned because of Mrs. Pelton, and that is why she is a significant educator.

- Maxwell Fiebelkorn

Kirk Wiersma



Mr. Wiersma always pushed me to do my best. He teaches Biology and Anatomy, which were my two favorite classes in high school. Through his classes was where I first found an interest in the field that I will be studying. He not only showed me the value of hard work in my studies, but always believed in me. He encouraged me to do my best and was my biggest fan when I was applying to colleges. I always loved being in his classroom and he always shared kind and inspirational words. Mr. Wiersma made a long lasting impact on me and I will forever remember his words of wisdom!

- Sophia Woodhams

Kristina Porter



Ms. Porter made Chemistry and AP Chemistry interesting and even fun despite the difficulty of the courses. She made the subject much easier than it seemed, and made the AP test a much easier test to take. I got a much better score than I expected on it because of the class.

- Benjamin Gangloff

Rachel King



Mrs. King is a highly supportive teacher who has helped improve my knowledge of the requirements and necessary steps to take to get to college in the best way possible. Her help has made it easier to understand and navigate the requirements for all parts of the process, as well as my knowledge of the importance of AP classes and dual-enrollment. Not to mention, she does a very good job teaching math, especially trigonometry, which is a lifesaver in calculus.

- Jack Gangloff

Amanda Szczesny



Mrs. Szczesny started off my high school career and showed me that high school wasn't anything to be scared of. She makes learning a fun and enjoyable experience, especially in Psychology. Mrs. Szczesny not only makes learning fun, but easy as well. She turns complicated ideas and theories into something everyone can understand. She has great compassion and dedication when it comes to her students. She is one of the best and most talented teachers I will ever know, and not just because of the two z's in her last name.

- Kyla Kane-Maystead

Colleen Chapoton



For the first two years of my educational career at the Kalamazoo Mathematics and Science Center, I had little interest in science. It was not until I met Ms. Chapoton during my junior year and took her AP Biology course that I fell in love with the scientific world. Her bubbly persona and endearing enthusiasm brought to life the information she was teaching. She never failed to provide a joke along with her helpful mitosis and meiosis activities, and she is never found without a kind smile. Without her, I would not have been so prepared for my heavy science course load this year or been looking to go into a scientific career. She has absolutely changed my path for the future.

- Savannah McDowell

