



2020 KALAMAZOO AREA

Excellence in Education

Student Comments on Significant Educators

Margaret Posthumus



“If I had to sum up Ms. Posthumus in one word, it would be ‘spectacular’ or ‘amazing’ or the ‘greatest-of-all-time.’ Okay, so I can’t fit her into one word, but it’s because she is just that awesome! I have fond memories of being in her kindergarten class and looking back on it now, Ms. P is mainly why I now want to work with kids as an elementary teacher. She wasn’t afraid to discipline (we needed it for sure), she passed her passion for learning onto her students, and still took the time to get to know every one of us individually. Whether I was screaming for my mom, earning some BubbleYum gum, or my clothespin was ‘on red,’ I always saw her as my hero and it's no different today!”

— **Simon Swager**

Nancy Nott



“Nancy has been on my side since day one. She’s always there to think of the things I forget about and keep me on track. I can go to her with any concern I have and she will work with me to get things squared away. She does everything she can to make my Early/Middle College experience the best it possibly can be.”

– **Jeme Richards**

Shannon Houtrouw



“I have to thank Mr. Houtrouw, my computer science teacher, for helping me discover my passion. When I began his class, I had no experience with coding. I was only taking the course because it was a required class at KAMSC. However, I soon fell in love with programming. There was never just one way to solve a problem. Computer science forced me to really think about problems in a way I never had to before. Each new task was more challenging than the last, but the difficulty made it so much more rewarding when I finished each program. I knew that I wanted to continue coding, so I signed up for AP Computer Science for my junior year and Discrete Mathematics and Advanced Computer Science for my senior year. All of these classes are taught by Mr. Houtrouw, and I am incredibly thankful to him for helping me grow as a programmer and a person.”

– Daniel Chatman

Trisha Stevens



“Although I have had many exceptional teachers and coaches over the years, Ms. Stevens has been the most influential educator because of the knowledge I gained, the individual attention I received, and the caring personality she demonstrated every day. She has substantially improved my writing skills and inspired me to be the best writer possible. I noticed she plans her lessons meticulously and spends time thoroughly grading each of our essays. Additionally, I enjoyed the novels Ms. Stevens chose as they broadened my literary scope. She introduced me to global and historical authors, such as Chinua Achebe and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Ms. Stevens is a kind, thoughtful person and I am glad that I was fortunate enough to learn from her.”

— Jayne Flynn

Diana Kwiatkowski



“Ms. Kwiatkowski has always provided me with incredible support throughout my high school career by calming my nerves, helping me choose classes, and answering my onslaught of questions about college applications. Most of all, though, she has been a constant source of comfort and kindness both in the guidance office and in the hallways. When I was extremely stressed about some scheduling conflicts during the first trimester of this year, she was always willing to help me through it and had my best interests at heart. I am so thankful that I have had her as my counselor for the past four years, preparing me well for the next chapter in my life.”

— **Sydney Free**

Anne Flynn



“As my physics teacher, Ms. Flynn sparked my interest in physics and encouraged me to pursue engineering. Her regular hands-on demonstrations made learning the content easier to understand and enjoyable. As one of the most consistently patient teachers, she was very encouraging to all students. For students that expressed an interest in physics, she went above and beyond to organize a women in engineering field trip that I was able to attend. The extra opportunities to explore the field solidified my interest in pursuing engineering.”

— **Kendra Hagey**

Timothy VanWormer



“Mr. VanWormer is the epitome of a caring and inspirational educator, concerned with not only imparting subject matter knowledge to his students, but demonstrating interest in their daily trials and tribulations. In addition to the individual attention he provides to questions I have in his and other classes, he always finds time to inquire about other aspects of my life. Our near daily banter has become a highlight of my morning routine.”

— **Alaina Hiemstra**

Margie Stone



“Ms. Stone consistently supports me in all of my academic pursuits. Along with teaching my favorite subject, biology, she pushes me to perform at the height of my ability and only deliver my absolute best work. I know that Ms. Stone has prepared me for the academic rigor in the next chapter of my life. I will always remember and take with me both her steady encouragement and genuine interest in the wellbeing of not just me, but all her students.”

— **Katherine Harpenau**

Philip Kilian



“Coach Kilian has impacted my life because he has not only pushed me to be a better soccer player on the field, but to be a better person off the field. He has encouraged me and reminded me that even though things like sports and grades are important, they are not the most important things in life. The relationships you make and have in life are the things that truly matter the most.”

– **Olivia Calnin**

Michael Sinclair



“I believe every student should have a teacher like Mr. Sinclair. The passion he has for his subject matter and his teaching is apparent and has helped inspire my interest in physics. Mr. Sinclair has pushed me to pursue more than I thought I was capable of, which has given me confidence in my abilities and my future career path.”

— **Ethan Fonger**

Valerie Vande Guchte



“Ms. Vande Guchte has always encouraged me to put my best effort forward in everything I do. She recognized my hard work as a student athlete and took the time to get to know me. Being relatively new to KPS, Ms. Vande Guchte helped me get adjusted and quickly became one of the special adults I could go to for anything. In the classroom, she's willing to help, encourages questions and meets all students' needs while holding them to high individualized standards. She has a true passion for what she does and really is an inspiration to her students. Thank you for all that you do!”

— **Isabelle Hawkes**

Rex Hafer



“Mr. Hafer is the best teacher I have ever had throughout my whole academic career. His dedication to teaching gives him the ability to engage and motivate his students to learn and push themselves to their full potential. He is a great role model for what students should aspire to be. Mr. Hafer has encouraged me to stand strong in my values and to be confident in my abilities, and it is because of him that I am the student I am today.”

– **Alyxandria Hough**

Steve Dyk



“Mr. Dyk is a significant teacher because of his ability to teach difficult concepts in ways that are easy to understand. There are many difficult and confusing concepts in biology, his main class, that Mr. Dyk can explain in simple terms using comparisons. Mr. Dyk is also a significant teacher because of how much he cares for his students and how well he equips them for their futures.”

— **Garrett Mallak**

Modhi Alshehri



“I met Mr. Alshehri in my junior year and ever since then he has been an impactful teacher on my educational development. Whenever I have trouble understanding the subject, he's always there to help answer questions without leaving out the details. He always believes in his students and pushes them to succeed at a high level. For that, I am thankful that Mr. Alshehri is one of my teachers.”

– **Daniel Nguyen**

Ken Briggs



“Mr. Briggs is incredibly significant to the development of my problem-solving abilities and my ability to pursue independent projects. As my robotics teacher, he has given me numerous opportunities to extend projects, take on new problems, and continue to challenge myself. I really appreciate all of the work he has done for me and the time he puts in to support his students.”

— **Cormac Roth**

Chartanay Bonner



“As a woman in a STEM field, Dr. Bonner is a role model for all students interested in a STEM career. She is also a fantastic teacher. She is kind and positive. She is always willing to help her student, even if it means going out of her way to do so. She makes chemistry enjoyable and interesting.”

– **Charity Sidwell**

Christina Holmes



“This educator is important to me because she is so much more than just a teacher. Señora Holmes is my friend. She is one of the only teachers I can say, with confidence, cares about me as a person. Being able to feel comfortable in her classroom allowed me to learn so much more than if it were a regular classroom setting. She made failing a teaching experience and succeeding a monumental accomplishment. She was there for me when I was at my lowest and pushed me to be even better on good days. Señora Holmes taught me so much more than just Spanish, and for that I am forever grateful.”

— **Adonia Alexopoulos**

Niambi Pringle



“I spent two years with Ms. Pringle learning about one of my favorite subjects: law. Her class had a great impact on me and is one of the reasons I want to become a lawyer. In addition to being an excellent educator, Ms. Pringle is kind, funny, honest and always seems to know when one of her students is struggling. I can't count the number of times she has reached out to me during school to check on me; she could often tell something was wrong just by looking at me. Most times, talking to her was exactly what I needed. She checks on her students and listens to their problems not because she has to, but because she truly cares. The world needs more teachers like Ms. Pringle.”

– **Riley Dominianni**

Kristin Antoniotti



“Sra. Antoniotti has been an important figure in my life for my whole high school career. She was the first teacher I had who introduced mindfulness and mental health into the classroom in a significant way. She showed all of us why mental health was important for not only our minds but our educations and our futures, and showed us ways we could incorporate mindfulness inside and outside the classroom. Learning these important things, especially at the beginning of my high school career, helped me to remember what really matters, and take care of myself as well as my academic responsibilities. I am indebted to Señora Antoniotti for everything she taught me, and all the support she has given me over the past four years.”

— **Lily Dorstewitz**

Bill Brieger



“Mr. Brieger was the first teacher I had who taught me to think critically about the world around me. Throughout his classes over the years, I learned about a wide variety of topics, from media surveillance to political philosophy. His enthusiasm for the curriculum led me to research ideas and form my own opinions, and be inquisitive about life's questions.”

– **Nathan Goodwin-Kelly**

Paul Mahar



“Ever since he became my swim coach when I was eight, Coach Mahar has supported me in both my aspirations while swimming, and my aspirations in life. He has been there to keep me grounded, humble and driven while always making sure I have a reason to laugh. He constantly demonstrates how to be a good leader, teammate and person. Paul Mahar works tirelessly to create relationships with every single person he meets and believes in working to make his community better. As I move forward in life, I hope to emulate his amazing ability to build communities where everyone feels valued.”

— **Carly Loken**

Michael Sinclair



“Mr. Sinclair has been my teacher for the past three years, teaching me a variety of subjects including calculus, physics, geology and astronomy. His passion for mathematics and science is obvious in the classroom and has helped me find these topics interesting as well. Along with teaching me the material, Mr. Sinclair has challenged me to write poems as lab reports and make murder mystery papers for geology. I really enjoy the time with him outside the classroom as well. Each day, we eat lunch together before KAMSC starts. During this, I talk to him about my future plans, get advice from him, and we try to teach each other about different television shows. He has shown me how to be comfortable enough around a teacher to not only ask for help when I need it in school, but to help me with life's challenges as well.”

– **Antoinette Puca**

Christine Kiel



“For the two years that Ms. Kiel has been my English teacher, she has taught me much more than what's on the curriculum. While teaching us literature and poetry, she has also been teaching us lessons in responsibility and communication. Ms. Kiel provides a safe and fun environment in which to learn. She does more than what is in her job description by forming strong bonds with her students. It is a privilege, not a chore, to be Ms. Kiel's student.”

– **Celia Kuch**

Branden Johnson



“Mr. Johnson is a person who is committed to the wellbeing and happiness of his students. In class, he is always excited to teach and makes his class fun through his brilliant sense of humor. He is always available to talk to about anything from politics to what's happening in your life. His genuine interest in his students is apparent and makes him someone who impacts his students in ways many other teachers can't. He is always there for anyone who needs him, both as an educator and a friend.”

– **Syed Mustafa**

Kathleen Frink



“I came into high school disliking mathematics while still being proficient in it. But after spending nearly three years in her classes in just two short years, Ms. Frink's unceasing dedication towards quality teaching has left an indelible impression upon me. Her patience and gentle demeanor is legendary. She actively makes sure that every student's question is answered, inviting curiosity rather than being annoyed by it. Her magical ability to condense complex subjects into the simplest of terms meant that I embraced and grew to love learning difficult concepts instead of shying away from them, carving a mindset that will undoubtedly further my studies in all areas during college and beyond. Indeed, I found myself studying mathematics outside of school for fun. In fact, I am now considering a career in the more quantitative facets of business and finance. I am glad to have had the pleasure of being a student of Ms. Frink.”

— **Ethan Lee**

Colleen Chapoton



“It is an incredible feat to make your typical dreary school classroom seem like a home to students, yet Ms. Chapoton, with her overwhelming positive energy and radiating warmth, handles the task with ease. In her biology classes, not only does every student feel appreciated, they are truly embraced for who they are, and there is this constant comforting feeling knowing Ms. Chapoton always has your back. Like all her students, I know I can consistently badger her afterschool with annoying questions about the latest lab report or worksheet, and with her seemingly infinite patience, she will always come through with an answer. However, Ms. Chapoton is not only dedicated to her students in school. She supports her students at sports games and research fairs, and she has even come to a few of my orchestra concerts. Her support is so immense that I can confidently say that, throughout my years of schooling, I have never encountered such a considerate teacher, and I hope that one day I can achieve at least a fraction of her golden character.”

— **Ranya Liu**

Colleen Chapoton



“Ms. Chapoton is one of the best teachers I have ever had. Her enthusiasm for biology is very inspiring and motivates me to be excited about science and learning in general. She is extremely kind and cares about all of her students; she really wants to see them succeed. I am so grateful to have had Ms. Chapoton as my teacher because she has made a significant impact on my high school career.”

— **Julia Strauss**

Shannon Houtrouw



“What has stood out to me about Mr. Houtrouw over the last three years is the unreal amount of time and energy that he puts into the computer science team. Every day after school, Mr. Houtrouw makes his room available for students to practice and improve their programming ability, whether they need to work on classwork or prepare for competitions. On Wednesdays, he stays at school until 7:30pm. In the spring he also comes to school every Saturday to help the team prepare for the American Computer Science League All-Star competition. In addition to constantly making himself and his room available to students, Mr. Houtrouw finds, signs us up for, and attends every high school programming competition within a three-hour drive of Kalamazoo. He's also a great teacher, but what I will remember about Mr. Houtrouw years down the road isn't the classroom instruction, it's his passion for teaching and motivating students to code.”

— **Chase Szafranski**

Shannon Houtrouw



“Mr. Houtrouw has been my computer science teacher since my sophomore year, and I want to thank him for everything he has done for me. From the very first day in his class, I found a passion for computer science. After thousands of programs and dozens of competitions over the course of three years, that passion continues to this day. Mr. Houtrouw challenges me to be the best I can possibly be and pushes me to improve every day. I am truly grateful for all he has done for me.”

– **Kevin Wang**

Mark Cardwell



“Not only was Mr. Cardwell my 11th grade precalculus teacher, but he also served as a mentor to me outside of the classroom. As the president of DECA at Portage Central High School, Mr. Cardwell was my go-to person to ask for advice about leadership and running the club. The perspectives he has shared with me are invaluable.”

– **Jessica Zhang**

Pilar Forero



“Sra. Forero is an absolutely amazing person. Both in and out of the classroom, she is looking for ways to make the biggest impact on her students. When I worked with her independently on an IB project, she was incredibly helpful, supportive, and made the whole process seamless. Throughout the last few years, we have had discussions on many topics that really challenged me to look at things in a new way. Something that makes Sra. Forero an incredible educator is her ability to connect so much of what we learn in Spanish to the rest of our lives. If we are learning about Spanish culture, or talking about a piece of literature, she takes the extra effort to tie in the topics from class to current events or ideas that are relevant to our society. Beyond that, Sra. Forero always is looking at life from a positive viewpoint, and that is clearly reflected on her students. I have learned so much about having an optimistic outlook on life no matter the situation while watching her actions throughout the past few years.”

– Zachary Zlomek

Gail Nelson



“I would not be in the place I am in today without Ms. Nelson. As a middle schooler, I was shy and uncertain in my mathematical capabilities. However, with her willingness to teach me two simultaneous math classes, sometimes three during lunch, she influenced me to focus on skills and develop as a strong mathematician. She greatly prepared me for the rigors of high school being two years advanced and also inspired my fondness of the subject. For me, Ms. Nelson not only represents my strong female role model in the field of STEM, but she has been a true inspiration in giving and showing great generosity towards others. She always found a way to be available for everyone in need and executed her talent with tremendous grace and patience. Thank you, Ms. Nelson.”

— **Riley Carlson**

Justin Olsen



“I signed up for IB Physics my junior year knowing that the class would be a challenge, but not knowing what to expect beyond that. Mr. Olsen completely exceeded my expectations on what a teacher could be, teaching me not just physics, but also how to truly learn. Mr. Olsen inspired me to become more and more active in my pursuit of knowledge in all subjects.”

– **Grace Fan**

Amanda Thorpe



“From my freshman year English class to three years of journalism, Dr. Thorpe has constantly pushed me to become the best version of myself that I can be. She has helped me as a person, as a student and as a leader, and without her I wouldn't be where I am today. The way she cares so much for her students motivates me to always do the best that I can. Dr. Thorpe is a role model for my future, and I hope one day I can positively impact someone the way she does every day.”

– **Malcolm Gaynor**

Shannon Houtrouw



“During the three years I've had the pleasure to call Mr. Houtrouw my teacher, he has been an incredible inspiration and influence. Not only has he educated me in the classroom, but he has also provided countless additional opportunities for me to develop my passion for computer science. Mr. Houtrouw invests a tremendous amount of time and energy into the education of all of his students. Mr. Houtrouw's gift and passion for teaching have inspired me and shaped my future aspirations. In addition to being a great educator, Mr. Houtrouw has been an outstanding mentor and life role model. Thank you for everything, Mr. Houtrouw.”

— **Jack Langejans**

Michelle Mason



“Ms. Mason, my chemistry teacher, has had a significant impact on my educational and career pursuits. When I signed up for two IB Science classes, my school counselor had warned me about the struggles I would face by pursuing such a rigorous IB Diploma, but Ms. Mason's support made this curriculum seem much easier. Through a combination of lectures, lab work and group activities, Ms. Mason continued to encourage my growth and learning. As a coach for Science Olympiad, a teacher and a guide, Ms. Mason has been a source of inspiration for me, and I owe my current pursuit of a career in engineering to her.”

— **Aayush Mohanty**

Shannon Houtrouw



“Mr. Houtrouw distinguishes himself by fostering an insatiable hunger for problem-solving and collaboration in his students. His charismatic lessons are memorable experiences and he has a remarkable ability to motivate his students to strive for excellence and encourages them to never settle for anything less. Personally, Mr. Houtrouw has provided me with numerous unique opportunities to pursue the subject that I am passionate about and without him, my love for programming would be nonexistent. In his class, I have learned to inspire others, persevere through adversity and maximize my true potential. For that, I am forever grateful and proud to have been his student.”

— **Arjav Patel**

Mark Cardwell



“Mr. Cardwell was my 9th grade Information Technology teacher and my 11th grade Precalculus teacher. Mr. Cardwell was an amazing educator for both subjects. Not only did I learn a ton from him, but he also made his classes very enjoyable. I feel like when I have any questions or concerns about school, college, or my career, it's rather easy to ask Mr. Cardwell for help. He always offers extremely insightful advice that will truly help me down the road. I am very thankful that I had Mr. Cardwell as a teacher because he taught me what being a thoughtful person, both emotionally and intellectually, really means.”

— **Jonah Pilnick**

Douglas Martin



“Despite being my teacher for less than two years, Mr. Martin has made a clear impact on me. He isn't afraid to treat his students with the utmost respect and, as such, is able to cultivate an environment that encourages discussion among students. Personally, I take his kindness as my biggest inspiration. Even through moments that may warrant a strict attitude, he is adamant about being as considerate as he can. Because of these reasons and the mark they've left on me, I see Mr. Martin as the most significant educator I've had.”

— **Andrew Smedley**

Matthew Dailey



“Mr. Dailey has had a large impact in his first year as our high school principal. He has improved our student body morale with his enthusiastic and approachable demeanor. By expressing care and compassion, he encourages student engagement in academics and extracurricular activities. He has a sincere interest in the success of each and every student and embodies characteristics of a great leader.”

— **Dani Warnaar**

Rachel King



“Ms. King is significant in my life because she pushes her students to learn, actively teaches us with passion and supports women in STEM. She has also started a new volunteer extracurricular at my school that allowed me and many other students to be more interactive in our community and opened up new horizons for me in particular.”

– **Jenna Beach**

Dustin Morris



“Mr. Morris has been teaching me since I was in 5th grade. He has not only helped me grow as a vocalist, but has aided me throughout my middle and high school years, helping shape me into the person I am today. He has shown me considerable kindness and care these past eight years and has contributed more to my growth academically and personally than any other adult outside of my family. It is for these reasons why he is a significant part of my life.”

— **Lindsay Fleck**

Rachel King



“Ms. King had a huge impact on my high school experience because she always was encouraging myself and my peers to do better in our classes and participate in more activities outside the classroom. Ms. King really made me feel as a student at Vicksburg that someone in the school cared about me succeeding, she always pushed me to do better and I appreciate that.”

– **Dawnara Rollins**

