Gratiot-Isabella RESD Board of Education Newsletter

October 2026

Message from the Board

From the Gratiot-Isabella RESD Board,

As we continue serving the students, families, and districts of Gratiot and Isabella counties, we remain grateful for the strong, innovative programs, and responsive services that help every learner succeed.

Thank you for your ongoing collaboration and dedication to the success of our schools and communities.

Sincerely,
Gratiot-Isabella RESD Board of Education



Welcome to October!

As autumn settles across Gratiot and Isabella counties, GIRESD is hard at work supporting our local districts, educators, and families. From specialized instruction and early childhood services to our CTE programs, fall is filled with exciting momentum across our region.

This month, we honor National Principals Month and celebrate our support staff during National Physical Therapy Month.

"Together, we can achieve far more than any one of us could alone."
— Helen Keller



Regional Highlights

October is a vibrant month across Gratiot and Isabella counties, filled with professional learning, fall initiatives, and opportunites to celebrate our community:

- **Statewide Recognition for GIRESD Staff:** We extend a warm congratulations to GIRESD's own Nick Murch, who was nominated as 1 of only 10 finalist statewide for the Michigan Association of School Psychologist (MASP) School Psychologist of the Year award! Having Nick recognized among the top practitioners in Michigan reflects the deep commitment, expertise, and care our support teams bring to local students and families every day.
- **Honoring School Leaders & Physical Therapist:** This month, we proudly observe **National Principals Month** by thanking the dedicated school leaders across our local districts who foster safe thriving environments. We also celebrate **National Physical Therapy Month**, recognizing our specialized RESD physical therapy team who support student mobility, independence, and physical development.

GRATIOT–ISABELLA RESD

GRATIOT-ISABELLA RESD

Fourth Annual FREE Community

THANKSGIVING DINNER

Tuesday, November 24, 2026

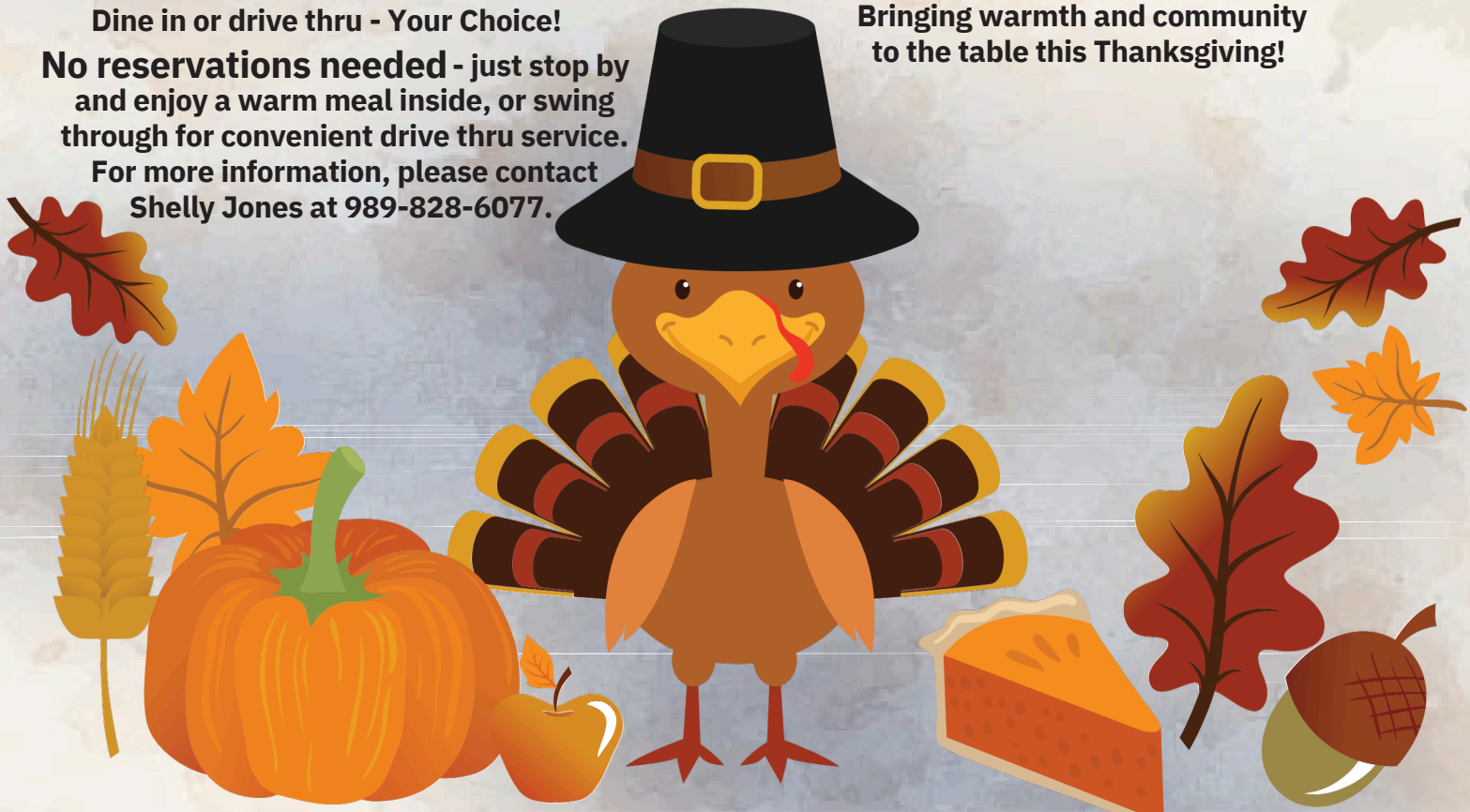
5:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Gratiot-Isabella RESD
1131E. Center Street
Ithaca, MI 48847

Dine in or drive thru - Your Choice!

No reservations needed - just stop by and enjoy a warm meal inside, or swing through for convenient drive thru service. For more information, please contact Shelly Jones at 989-828-6077.

Bringing warmth and community to the table this Thanksgiving!



Human Resources

A Word from the HR Corner:

Growth, collaboration, and community impact have been at the forefront of our work this month! As GIRESD continues to expand, so does our capacity to support our students, schools, and local districts through every season of change.

Thank you for everything you bring to GIRESD and the communities we serve. Here's to celebrating our people, embracing growth, and moving forward together!

Upcoming in the Department:

At the end of September we hosted our quarterly GIRESD HR Roundtable. 6 of our local districts attended this meeting. We had a great conversation surrounding many HR topics (FMLA, Work Comp, ADA, Insurance Costs, Youth Employment Portal, etc)

We welcome our continued partnership with SETSEG as we continue to educate our staff on the options available for healthcare coverage.



Chelsea Giles
HR Director



Kim Greening
Benifits Coordinator

Welcome to the Team!

This month we welcomed the following new hires

- Dolinda Rhodes, GLBMW Program Manager
- Amir Antwine, GLBMW Career Coach
- Amy Reynolds, GLBMW Career Coach
- Linzy Garcia, Paraprofessional
- Marisa Raycraft, Paraprofessional
- Julie Wiles, Paraprofessional
- Shannon Lewis, Paraprofessional
- Kristen Schafer , Paraprofessional

"Send them our way!"

Open Positions:

- GLBMW Career Coach (Midland)
- GLBMW Career Coach (Saginaw)
- GLBMW Career Coach - PATH (Isabella)
- GLBMW Employment Services Advisor (Isabella)
- MOCI Teacher (Carrie Knause)
- 1 SEI Paraprofessionals (K-2 Shepherd)
- School Psychologist (.6 FTE)
- APE Teacher
- Special Education Supervisor

"Good People. Great Things!"

Kim Greening, GIRESD Benefit Coordinator!

Kim originally joined GIRESD as a Payroll Coordinator before transitioning into her current role, where she also assists with key HR tasks. She has quickly earned the trust of our staff as a knowledgeable, dedicated advocate who works tirelessly to ensure everyone receives the benefits and support they deserve. Kim never shies away from hard work or tough conversations, and her drive to learn and grow makes her an invaluable part of our department. GIRESD is lucky to have her!

Let us remind you..

Is your demographic information up to date?

Please review EA and Employee Navigator to ensure accuracy.

EA: Employee Access (Payroll Platform) Employee Navigator: Employee Benefits

Special Education

Future Teachers, Essential Skills: A Three-Part Special Education Series



Teacher Consultants Jimmy Henry and Gaynor McKenzie were invited to deliver a three-part series to high school students enrolled in the CTE Education General pre-teaching program at Mt. Pleasant High School.

The sessions provided future educators with foundational knowledge in special education, covering key areas including:

- An over view of the legal frameworks and mandates govering special education services.
- A practical look at special education within the public schools.
- Evidence-based behavioral intervention and classroom management strategies to support diverse learners.

Adventure, Growth, and Unforgettable Memories:

This summer, our program for students with visual impairments brought together 13 amazing students and 5 dedicated staff members for an unforgettable season packed with adventures, learning, and fun!

Our days were filled with exciting hands-on experiences across the community. Students enjoyed meals at IHOP, caught a movie, explored nature at the Forest Hills Nature Area, drove a simulated tractor at IQhub, braved the water slides at Soaring Eagle Waterpark, learned to golf, ran their own pop-up coffee shop, and cooled off with an epic water balloon fight.

The undisputed highlight of the summer was our overnight camping trip to Camp T, where students got to share the camping experience alongside their parents. Beyond all the exciting activities, this summer was truly about fostering independence, building self-confidence, creating lifelong friendships, and making memories that will last far beyond the season.
— Daryl Dawe, VI Teacher Consultant



Mentorship in Motion

On September 15, special education mentors and mentees gathered at the Winding Brook Conference Centre to build professional relationships and explore key strategies for effectove mentorship.

Currently, the special education department supports 19 mentees - 12 teachers and 7 itinerant staff guided by 12 RESD mentors. To accommodate the volume of teacher mentees, several mentors are supporting multiple colleagues through their required mentorship periods. Mentorship is required for staff members who are newly certified, new to the RESD, or currently on an Individual Development Plan (IDP)

MAHPERD Grant

The Adaptive PE program received a $1500.00 grant from the Michigan Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. The grant will provide an opportunity for all students in RESD programs to experience Soaring Eagle Water Park with the support they need to be successful.

MAHPERD
Michigan Association for
Health • Physical Education • Recreation • Dance

Career & Technical Education

GI TEC Students and Teachers Showcase Manufacturing Career Readiness

The Mid Michigan Manufacturing Association (M3A) had their annual meeting on October 13th. As a part of the event, they invited the CTE programs from the region to attend and highlight how their programs prepare students for careers in manufacturing. We had teachers and students representing GI TEC at the M3A meeting. This meeting included many employers, associations, and employment related representatives. Our teachers and students did a great job representing how our programs align to their workforce needs.







Building Career Pathways Through Work-Based Learning

We have really made progress with enhanced WBL opportunities such as officeal co-ops. One lighlight is Legend Manufacturing. This is a company that decided to attend our initial Gratiot Career and Recruitment Expo. From that, they started a relationship with our Career Navigators who worked with Legend, CTE program instructors, and school administration to establish what has become several co-op placements.

" I have been working full time since graduation. My co-op experience was crucial in getting me in the industry before I graduated. The co-op taught me the skills I needed to succeed here as a full time employee." - Keith Dargitz, '26 graduate from the Welding Program

" My co-op has changed how I view my future. I've been able to get more hands-on experience that has helped prepare me for what I would like to do after graduation." - Jake Johnston, Alma High Senior

" I was hesitant at first about the co-op program, but once these students came in and I met them, my opinion completely changed. These young workers are a breath of fresh air. They bring excitement and enthusiasm to our workforce. Our full-time employees love working with these young students and teaching them the job." - Aaron McLaughlin, Legend Manufacturing COO

"These young men have restored my faith in the workforce. Very responsible young men that do what we asked them to do. No drama, no problems." - Jeff Troub, Legend Manufacturing Production Floor Manager

A Full-Circle Partnership

Legend Manufacturing generously offered Alma's Construction Trades program a 2027 Legend Thunder 7' x 14' enclosed trailer at cost and connected staff with Beck's Trailer for excellent customer service. Equipped with E-Trac tie-downs, ladder racks, and a wheel lock, the trailer will safely transport tools and materials.

Manufactured in March 2026 while nine of our Welding students were completing co-op experiences at Legend, the trailer represents a full-circle partnership—our students helped build the very trailer now supporting our Construction Trades program.



Forest Hill Nature Center

The Magic of Fall: Colorful Leaves and the Wildlife Beneath Them

As autumn arrives, our forests and neighborhoods transform into a beautiful display of red, orange, yellow, and gold. But have you ever wondered what causes this colorful change—or what happens to all those fallen leaves once they reach the ground?

Leaves change color as days grow shorter and temperatures cool. Throughout spring and summer, leaves contain chlorophyll, the green pigment that captures sunlight and helps trees produce food through photosynthesis. As autumn approaches, trees begin breaking down chlorophyll and preparing for winter. This allows other pigments to become visible, revealing the yellow and orange colors we recognize in fall. Red and purple colors can develop when trees produce pigments called anthocyanins.

Eventually, trees form a protective layer where each leaf attaches to its branch, allowing the leaf to fall. This seasonal process helps deciduous trees prepare for freezing temperatures and conserve resources during winter. Interestingly, the buds for next year are already on the tree. Depending on the tree species, the buds can be very tiny or quite large. The leaf will unfurl as soon as the spring days grow longer and temperatures warm up.







A lot of people ask when the peak time for fall colors will happen. This year we can expect a peak from October 21-24th. Weather, temperature, and rainfall can influence the timing, so conditions may vary from place to place. You can follow weekly updates and explore the interactive map at Pure Michigan's Fall Color Map and Report. Remember Forest Hill Nature Area is closed during the construction of our new building - so be sure to plan your hikes elsewhere!

Once the colorful leaves begin to fall, it can be tempting to rake every last one away. However, those leaves provide much more than autumn scenery—they create essential habitat for wildlife!

Many insects spend the winter tucked beneath fallen leaves, including caterpillars, moths, butterflies, beetles, and other beneficial invertebrates. Woolly bear caterpillars, for example, overwinter in their larval stage, sheltered beneath natural debris. Other insects survive the winter as eggs, pupae, or adults in leaf litter, plant stems, and other protected places.

A layer of leaves also helps insulate the soil, retain moisture, return nutrients to the ground as they decompose, and provide shelter for small animals. Removing every leaf can disturb or destroy these important winter refuges before the insects have a chance to emerge in spring.

This fall, consider leaving some leaves beneath trees and shrubs, around garden beds, or in a designated natural area of your yard. Keep storm drains, walkways, and areas where thick leaves could damage grass clear as needed.

At Forest Hill Nature Area, we know that some of the most important wildlife habitats are easy to overlook. This fall, enjoy the changing colors overhead—and remember the small creatures depending on the leaves underfoot. By leaving a little of nature undisturbed, we can help support healthy ecosystems right in our own backyards!

Finance & Operations

Claims

The monthly Claims Report highllights key expenditures for the month, including several notable items:

1. A payment to Mt. Pleasant Public Schools of $343,392.50 represents the sales price (after closing costs) of the house constructed by the Constrution Trades Program.

2. A payment to Alma Public Schools of $23,641.98 reimburses the cost of an Early Math Coach for the first quarter of the fiscal year. The Section 23H grant covers these cost.

3. A prepayment to Seward Consulting LLC of $13,900 covers the cost of four days of training scheduled for February and April 2027. The Early Literacy Grant (Section 35a4) will cover these costs.

Property Tax Collections

As of September 30, 2026, property tax collections stand at 17.8%, totaling $4,160,112. Overall, collections are slightly ahead of prior year rates. Currently, only the summer tax levy in the City of Alma and the City of Mt. Pleasant is being collected. The Balance of the levy will be collected from the other townships and cities during the winter tax levy.

Special Education High Cost Work Group

Representation from the district will join a statewide committee of approximately 20 individuals to develop recommendations for funding special education costs for students requiring high-cost programing.

The initiative is step 3 of a four-step plan to increase special education funding in Michigan:

1. **Foundation Allowance Addition:** Provide the foundation allowance for special education students in addition to the required 28.6183% funding of special education instructional cost (under Headlee). This step is complete and provided a significant boost to funding.

2. **Section 56 Funding Adjustment:** Increase and modify Section 56 funding to better equalize what ISDs can generate in property taxes between districts with high vs. low taxable values per student. This step has been under development without implementation.

3. **High-Cost Programming Funding:** Provide additional funding for students requiring “High-Cost Programming.” This step has been under development for a few years, led by advocates such as Dr. Scott Koenigsknecht of Clinton County RESA.

4. **Section 51f Unfunded Cost Coverage:** Provide additional funding under Section 51f to cover a larger portion of special education costs not currently funded. This step is not yet actively underway.

Five committee meetings are scheduled between October 8th and February 11th.

Forest Hill Construction Project

New reports are available regarding the Forest Hill construction project:

- **Construction Finance Report:** Details contract amounts, change orders, contingency funds, and total project cost.
- **Change Orders Report:** Outlines the specific change orders, including descriptions and associated costs.

CONNECT & COLLABORATE

October 2026

We Want to Hear From You!

Thank you for staying connected with our regional education community. Building strong pathways for our students takes all of us working together, and your voice matters!

If you have an upcoming event, a student success story, or an innovative program you'd like featured in a future issue or if you have any questions about the initiatives in this newsletter, please reach out directly to Isabelle Castillo, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, at icastillo@giresd.net or 989-875-5601.







Stay Connected

Stay connected with Gratiot-Isabella RESD! We are dedicated to supporting our local schools, educators, families, and community partners. Use the links and resources below to keep up with the latest educational initiatives, professional development opportunities, and regional updates.

Ways to Stay Connected

- **Visit Our Website:** Explore news, department resources, and program offerings at giresd.net.
- **Follow Us on Social Media:** Join our online community on Facebook and Twitter/X (@GIRESD) for real-time updates, classroom highlights, and event announcements.
- **Check the Professional Learning Calendar:** View upcoming workshops, training sessions, and SCECH opportunities on our online course catalog.
- **Reach Out to Us:** Have questions or need assistance? Call our central administration office at (989) 875-5101 or contact us directly through our online contact form.

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