

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

**CHARTER
SCHOOLS
OFFICE**

READY FOR WHATEVER IS NEXT

At Grand Valley, next is opportunity and innovation. Next is global, connecting and uniting us. It's local, shaping the spaces in which we work and live. It's a commitment to progress. Next is where minds are free to imagine what could be. At GVSU, next is now. And whatever's next, we will empower our students, our communities, and our partners to reach higher to get there.

22,269

STUDENTS

300+

AREAS OF
STUDY

4

CAMPUSES

gvsu.edu/next



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Philomena Mantella, Ph.D.
President



Leah Breen
Assistant Vice President
for Charter Schools

Dear friends,

At Grand Valley State University, innovation is a foundational part of our routines and our framework for success. By dedicating even just a few minutes each day to consider how we can enhance current practices, we create a culture where bold ideas are developed, refined, and implemented to ensure every learner has access to an education that fits their authentic self.

That culture of continuous improvement is also a core piece of the commitment Grand Valley makes to K-12 public school communities across Michigan. We aim to exceed the expectations of a charter public school authorizer, reimagining how a public university can empower students, families, and educators in all stages of lifelong learning.

This report highlights how Grand Valley's Charter Schools Office is furthering that mission. It details high-quality advances in our oversight and compliance responsibilities, as well as creative collaborations that enrich K-12 stakeholders in new ways. You'll also read how the GVSU CSO works across university divisions and alongside our charter public schools to find impactful, sustainable solutions for learners today and in the future.

The result of our approach to charter authorization is the trust families place in GVSU and our charter public schools. They believe in GVSU to reach higher to provide a nurturing learning environment for all. We are excited to be a catalyst for change in public education and to continue partnering with K-12 communities to develop what comes next.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Philomena Mantella".

Philomena Mantella, Ph.D.
President
Grand Valley State University

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leah Breen".

Leah Breen
Assistant Vice President for Charter Schools
Grand Valley State University



Mission:

Grand Valley State University authorizes charter schools to join together professors, practitioners, policymakers, and communities (3P+C) in new ways to solve problems in education.

Vision:

We strive to be the model university authorizer by accessing the university’s collective resources and diversity to contribute to the enrichment and constant improvement of all Grand Valley State University-authorized schools.

Values:

At Grand Valley State University’s Charter Schools Office, the primary focus is understanding complex problems in the GVSU network of schools, facilitating the design of solutions, and advancing remarkable change in teaching and learning. Our mission, vision, and strategic outcomes reflect the university’s five core values. These core values provide a foundation and framework for all of the Charter School Office’s decision-making processes:

- Inquiry
- Inclusive and Equitable Community
- Integrity
- Innovation
- International Perspectives



Members of the Board of Trustees – Grand Valley State University

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- Elizabeth C. Emmitt – Board of Trustees, GVSU
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- Rob Kimball, Ed.D. – Associate Vice President and Executive Assistant to the President, GVSU
- Mary Kramer – Director, Crain Communications
- Sherril Soman, Ph.D. – Dean, College of Education and Community Innovation, GVSU
- Buzz Thomas – Principal, Activate Detroit



Grand Valley State University
creates innovative solutions
that support educators in
GVSU charter public schools.

PRACTITIONERS

Strengthening the Teacher Pipeline Through Scholarship Expansion

The GVSU CSO promotes the teaching profession annually by helping more up-and-coming educators find new ways to put their learning into practice. One of the ways this is accomplished is through the GVSU CSO’s Clinical Field Experience Scholarship. Historically, this scholarship was awarded to students who sought to complete their student-teaching internship in a GVSU-authorized charter public school in Detroit, helping school communities with the highest of needs.

This year, the GVSU CSO and College of Education and Community Innovation (CECI) expanded the scholarship to support students who needed to remain close to GVSU’s campus due to logistical or financial barriers. The scholarship’s expansion now assists Laker undergraduates who want to fulfill their learning requirements in a GVSU-authorized charter public school located in West Michigan. Thanks to the scholarship, 16 Lakers were placed in West Michigan schools during the 2023-2024 school year.



Creating more pathways for co-curricular experiences helps students further their studies while also opening more doors to potential employment upon graduation. The GVSU CSO believes that students who find more schools that they love as they enter the teaching profession will be more likely to remain committed to K-12 education for their careers. ♦

\$106,254
provided to GVSU student teacher apprentices

Advancing Inquiry by Sharing Research Nationally

At Grand Valley, we embrace the opportunity to consistently examine current practices to find better solutions for kids and educators. Our commitment to inquiry often uncovers opportunities for growth and new pathways for enhancing the journey toward lifelong learning.

During the 2023-2024 school year, the GVSU CSO was invited across the nation to share its research and findings related to college enrollment and first-year student persistence in relation to students who were enrolled in GVSU’s charter public high schools. The studies were conducted with assistance from Basis Policy Research, an independent research group.

The results of the studies offered insights into how likely students in GVSU’s charter public high schools are to engage in postsecondary education opportunities, enroll in college, and remain in college after their first year.

This type of ongoing research helps the GVSU CSO and its schools identify areas where more resources can be deployed to better support the success of all learners. It also positions GVSU as a research leader in the charter public school space, further pushing the boundaries of what is possible as a charter school authorizer. ♦

» Learn More

When and Where: CSO Presented Research During 2023-2024 School Year



October 18-20, 2023
Midwestern Education Research Association Annual Meeting (Cincinnati, OH)

November 15-16, 2023
University Council for Educational Administration Annual Convention (Minneapolis, MN)

January 3-6, 2024
Hawaii International Conference on Education (Honolulu, HI)

March 24-27, 2024
Carnegie Summit (San Diego, CA)

April 11-14, 2024
American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (Philadelphia, PA)

Exploring New Ways to Support School Improvement



Jeff Maxwell, GVSU CSO

Grand Valley strives to meaningfully contribute to the success of the schools it charters beyond making good authorizing decisions. Part of that work includes tackling complex challenges alongside school communities.

That belief was uniquely explored this year after leaders from one GVSU charter school district reached out to the CSO following their latest charter contract renewal evaluation.

They wanted to proactively uncover instructional gaps earlier so they could quickly address them with teachers. They also wanted to ensure any adjustments they made to district instructional practices and priorities were better aligned to their charter contract expectations and renewal benchmarks.

The CSO helped the leaders compare the district’s teacher evaluation tool with GVSU’s renewal benchmarks to find

alignments, which were then prioritized for additional classroom observations. During the school year, more than 500 observations were made across the district, with 150 coming from the CSO’s Jeff Maxwell.

Teacher feedback was then collected by Basis Policy Research to evaluate perceptions about observation effectiveness. The findings aim to provide actionable data for the district that they can use toward continuous improvement initiatives in 2024-2025.

Ultimately, this type of collaboration may show how charter public school authorizers can better support school improvement efforts, helping accelerate improved student outcomes. ♦

500+
classroom observations conducted

Continuing to Build Equitable K-12 Learning Environments

Equity and inclusion for all kids requires a commitment to examining and refining current practices to better meet the diverse needs of learners. Such commitment drives the CSO to connect educators in GVSU charter public schools to experts and resources that can inspire development toward this goal.

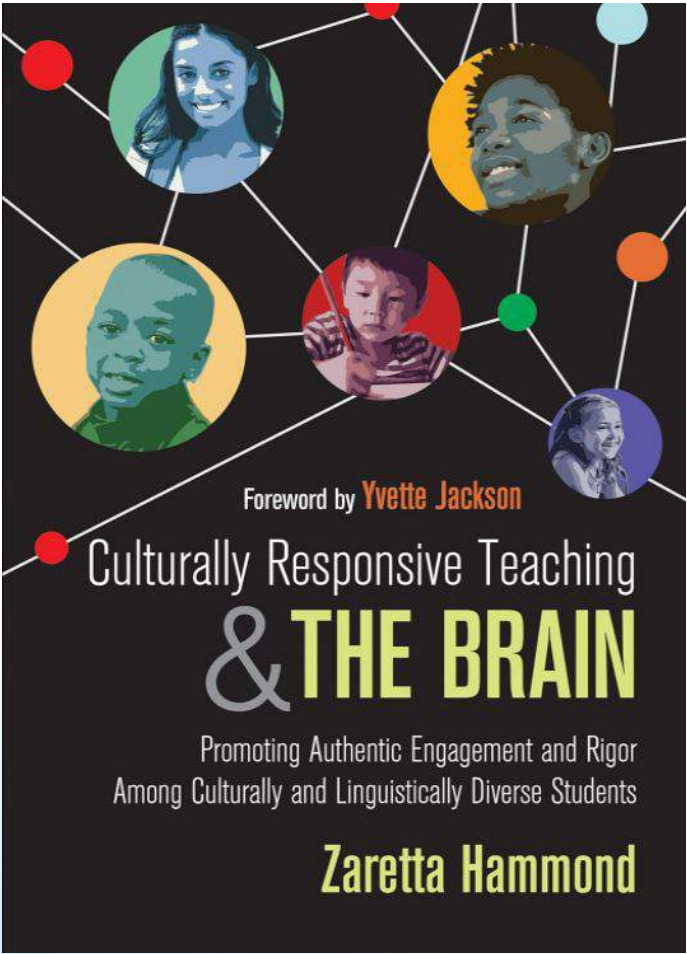


The CSO partnered with The Africa-America Institute for a year-long exploration of Zaretta Hammond’s book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*. Led by Olivia Lynch, Ed.D., the AAI’s teaching Africa program coordinator, the book study focused on creating instructional strategies and environments that improve support for diverse student populations. Participants also learned

about the neuroscience behind student learning, self-leadership, and academic excellence.

Inviting educators to reflect upon their own practices opens more doors for inspiration and personal growth, which can

lead to better classroom connections – and outcomes – for more learners. ♦



Creating Classroom Content Alongside Michigan's Poet Laureate

A major benefit of being a university charter school authorizer is having the ability to develop resources that creatively support teachers and broaden student understanding of other peoples' perspectives. This year, the CSO had the pleasure of continuing this work thanks to support from Nandi Comer, Michigan's poet laureate and the first Black woman to hold the distinction in the state.

Nandi joined the CSO at WGVSU's studios to record a handful of videos that would go exclusively to middle and high school classrooms across GVSU's portfolio of charter schools. While in studio, Nandi shared details about her background, creative

process, and top tips for any writer. She also read a few select poems and described what inspired her to write each selection. The recordings were then distributed to schools incrementally throughout March as part of Reading Month celebrations.



Nandi Comer

» [Learn More](#)



Partnering with Nandi for these recordings is just one example of how the CSO utilizes campus resources and digital tools to benefit more teachers and students. Thanks to her visit, hundreds of teachers now have access to a unique resource that they can use alongside their curriculum each year. Such recordings also provide more pathways for students to become inspired by an award-winning creator who may have experienced many of the same things they are currently going through as kids. Giving more students more chances to discover passions and growth ultimately furthers GVSU's commitment to providing an empowered educational experience for all. ♦



The Grand Valley State University Charter Schools Office is the nexus where K-12 education and higher education professionals unite.

PROFESSORS

Charter School Basketball Showcase

At GVSU, innovation stems from trying ideas that have the potential to move learning forward in new ways. The CSO has long sought to contribute to this by exploring ideas that could meaningfully blend academics and athletics for students in GVSU’s charter schools, as well as GVSU undergraduates. That goal that was realized this year through the inaugural Charter School Basketball Showcase.

“This is the start to a hopeful partnership between the Charter Schools Office and sport management, in which students get an opportunity to use experiential learning to host an event.”
- Jon Coles

To achieve this goal, the CSO teamed up with Jon Coles, Ph.D., assistant professor of sports management, and 25 Laker students. The event would be an opportunity for the GVSU students in Coles’ Sport Facility and Event Management class to turn their studies into a real-life experience for students and families from GVSU’s charter public schools, where they would manage every aspect of the experience.



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Charter School Basketball Showcase

Their plans came to fruition on December 14, 2023, when the boys' basketball teams from Vanguard Charter Academy and Walker Charter Academy stepped onto GVSU's Fieldhouse Arena for their season finale game. The teams warmed up with help from the GVSU men's basketball team, and every player received a spotlight introduction before tip-off. Each school's cheer team also performed during timeouts, and fans were invited to participate in small competitions in between each quarter. As the final horn sounded, Walker players celebrated their hard-fought 57-53 win.

The showcase exemplifies what can be accomplished through campus connections that empower learners of a variety of ages and create memorable moments. Moving forward, the CSO and Coles aim to expand the partnership to include more schools and a variety of new activities each semester. ♦

» **Read More @ GVNEXT**

Grand Valley Student Reporting Labs Launch

New growth opportunities for students come from innovative, interdisciplinary collaboration that allows students to both study a subject and apply their knowledge on real-world projects. This year, the CSO celebrated the launch of Grand Valley Student Reporting Labs (GVSRL), alongside faculty and staff members from GVSU’s School of Communications, College of Education and Community Innovation, and WGVU Public Media.

GVSRL uses a national database of journalism curriculum to help students develop skills around digital media, critical thinking, and communication. Students who participated in SRL explored topics they are curious about while telling their story through original news reports. The SRL partnership through Grand Valley enhances the program in a way that gives extra benefits to the schools and students who participate. When a classroom utilizes GVSRL, students also get additional support from undergraduate students at Grand Valley.



High school teachers test out camera equipment during a GVSRL workshop.

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Grand Valley Student Reporting Labs Launches

Here's how it works: A classroom that wants to participate in GVSRL will have a teaching apprentice from CECI assigned to the classroom for the year. Not only is this person trained in SRL, they are also there to support everyday learning alongside the classroom teacher. A multimedia journalism student from Grand Valley is also assigned to the class to assist with the technical aspects of SRL, like video recording, audio, editing, and story development.

Participating Schools: East Kentwood High School | Grand River Preparatory High School | Hopkins High School | Sparta High School



A Grand River Prep student interviews GVSU Provost Fatma Mili.



GVSRL participants at the futureEDlab ribbon-cutting.

Furthering Food Allergy Awareness in K-12 Settings

The CSO continued its partnership with professors from the GVSU School of Interdisciplinary Health to investigate if food allergy training initiatives increase the knowledge and comfort among teachers and administrators in managing and preventing food allergy reactions in school settings.

The multi-year research project was completed by clinical dietetic graduate students Kelli Nolan and Ashley Frank with guidance from Jennifer Ford, M.A., RDN, program director and assistant professor, clinical dietetics coordinated graduate program and Libby MacQuillan, Ph.D., RDN, associate professor, applied food and nutrition program.



Jennifer Ford



Libby MacQuillan



159
Survey Participants

14%
Middle School Teachers

23%
High School Teachers

63%
K-5 Teachers

CONTINUED »

Furthering Food Allergy Awareness in K-12 Settings

The study assessed the knowledge and comfort level of teachers and administrators before and after food allergy education training using pre- and post-evaluation. Participants from GVSU-authorized charter schools first took a presurvey, then watched a 15-minute video on anaphylaxis, and finally completed a postsurvey. All items of the study were approved by GVSU's Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB).

Overall, participants who completed the food allergy training video were more aware and comfortable handling food allergies in schools. Out of 11 knowledge questions that participants answered, a total score out of 11 was calculated and compared for the pre- and post-tests. The mean score on the pretest was 8.4 and the mean score on the post-test was 10.1, showing a significant increase in score. Also included were questions regarding recognizing food allergy reactions, comfort level with using an EpiPen, and confidence questions. Each of these mean scores also showed an increase between pre- and post-tests.

Research-driven partnerships like this exemplify how GVSU can use its resources to positively improve K-12 learning environments. By evaluating the effectiveness of a specific food allergy training program, the study's findings provide insights into how school leaders can use actionable solutions to better meet the needs of each student. ♦



Overall, participants who completed the food allergy training video were more aware of and comfortable handling food allergies in schools.

Special Education Coffee Hour

Charter public schools are designed to give families more K-12 education opportunities that can best fit the learning needs of each child. GVSU expects the charter public schools that it authorizes to fulfill this promise, in part, through learning environments that advance inclusion and accessibility.

The monthly Special Education Coffee Hour series offered educators relevant and practical information across a broad range of topics that would help meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. Each session was led by Jan Weckstein, the CSO's special

education expert, and GVSU colleague Nichole Moore, who serves as the graduate program director for the special education administration program at GVSU.

Together, Jan and Nichole assisted teachers on how to provide compliant special education programs and services that also produced high-quality student outcomes. ◆



Nichole Moore



Jan Weckstein

Session Topics by Month

OCTOBER - Student behavior

NOVEMBER- Creating the least restrictive learning

DECEMBER - Grant-funded programs for special populations

JANUARY - Educational transition planning

FEBRUARY - Monitoring student progress

MARCH - IEP and 504 reminders

APRIL - Manifestation determination reviews

MAY - Special education tips and reminders



POLICYMAKERS

Schools thrive when everyone involved — teachers, school leaders, board members, and public officials — shares expectations and works toward common goals for kids. The Grand Valley State University Charter Schools Office works to align policies among all stakeholders.

Supporting Inquiry Around Innovative and Equitable Policies

The potential impact that a policy may have on K-12 schools can best be realized when decisionmakers understand how the policy will be felt within classrooms. GVSU's diverse portfolio of charter public schools can further such understanding by giving policymakers the opportunity to connect with learners and teachers from different backgrounds and education environments.

The CSO embraced this supporting role this year as numerous ideas were proposed across Michigan on how to creatively expand teacher certification pathways. During considerations, a gap was noticed among the brainstorming: Educators in Michigan's 170 Montessori schools (including 29 public school programs) would possibly miss out on benefits of any certification adjustments. Instead, they would still carry the burden of getting a traditional teaching certification, as well as a separate Montessori certification. As policymakers wanted to know more about how to make changes equitable to Montessori educators, the CSO worked with the Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA) to connect them to teachers from GVSU-authorized charter schools that offer Montessori programming.

This is just one example of how the CSO is in position to join together various stakeholders to create solutions within public education. By opening more doors to meaningful insights, decisions for the future can lead to better opportunities for all kids and teachers. ♦



Students from a Montessori school participate in the GVSU Groundswell Stewardship Initiative student project showcase.

Celebrating Schools and Boards That Further GVSU's Values

GVSU sees the public schools it charters as extensions of the broader university community. That is why the GVSU CSO presents a Core Value Award each year to a school whose program, project, or practice demonstrates advancement of a particular GVSU core value. The 2023-2024 award was for our value of integrity and focused on initiatives that actively pursue and sustain quality educational experiences rooted in evidence.

This year, the judges named Detroit Achievement Academy (DAA) and The Greenspire School co-winners for their creative



GVSU CSO's Gretchen Lahaie with Detroit Achievement Academy board member Gregory DeMars.

efforts around student-led accountability. At DAA, for example, students work in partnership with their teachers to determine their official character score, with the final score being agreed upon by both parties. The Greenspire School emphasizes responsibility with its high school students by selecting ambassadors who help the school connect with the surrounding community.

Such initiatives show how GVSU's charter public schools are creatively empowering more students to reach higher and build the tools to become successful lifelong learners. ♦



GVSU CSO members Gretchen Lahaie, Matt Missias, and Leah Breen with The Greenspire School board member Louis Pardo

Improving Authorizing Functions Through Digital Solutions

A school board’s ability to strategically move the school toward long-term success has a direct impact on how well kids learn and grow. That’s why the GVSU CSO stridently holds boards accountable to their oversight role and continuously aims to improve each board’s governance capacity through effective support.

To further such work, the CSO was pleased to welcome Gretchen LaHaie and Lilly Saunders to the team as the deputy director for school accountability and the school accountability specialist, respectively. Gretchen and Lilly utilized their combined career experiences in school operations and oversight to immediately start streamlining and digitizing a number of the CSO’s board support processes over the course of the school year.

The changes now allow the CSO and school boards to use real-time data to identify compliance trends and see where board member habits or processes could improve. As a result, boards are better equipped to quickly adjust, so they can spend more time focused on developing their strategic vision for student achievement. ♦



Gretchen LaHaie



Lilly Saunders

ACADEMY

The Grand Valley State University
Charter Schools Office strengthens
and expands relationships between the
university, its charter public schools,
and the communities they serve.

COMMUNITY



Meeting More Family Needs with Two New Schools

The fall of 2023 marked the launch of two GVSU-authorized charter schools that were founded in response to two different, but persistent, needs of K-12 learners in Michigan: (1) being able to read with confidence at an early age; and (2) learning in an environment where they felt safe and respected.

Gerald Dawkins Academy, located in the heart of Grand Rapids, rolled out the red carpet for students as teachers and board members welcomed the inaugural cohort of learners on the first day of school. The school served 66 students in grade K-3 in its first year and will continue to grow into a K-5 school in years to come. The school has partnered with the Center for Sound Literacy Foundation to ensure more learners are proficient in reading when they reach 3rd grade.



Students at Gerald Dawkins Academy share what they are excited about at their new school.

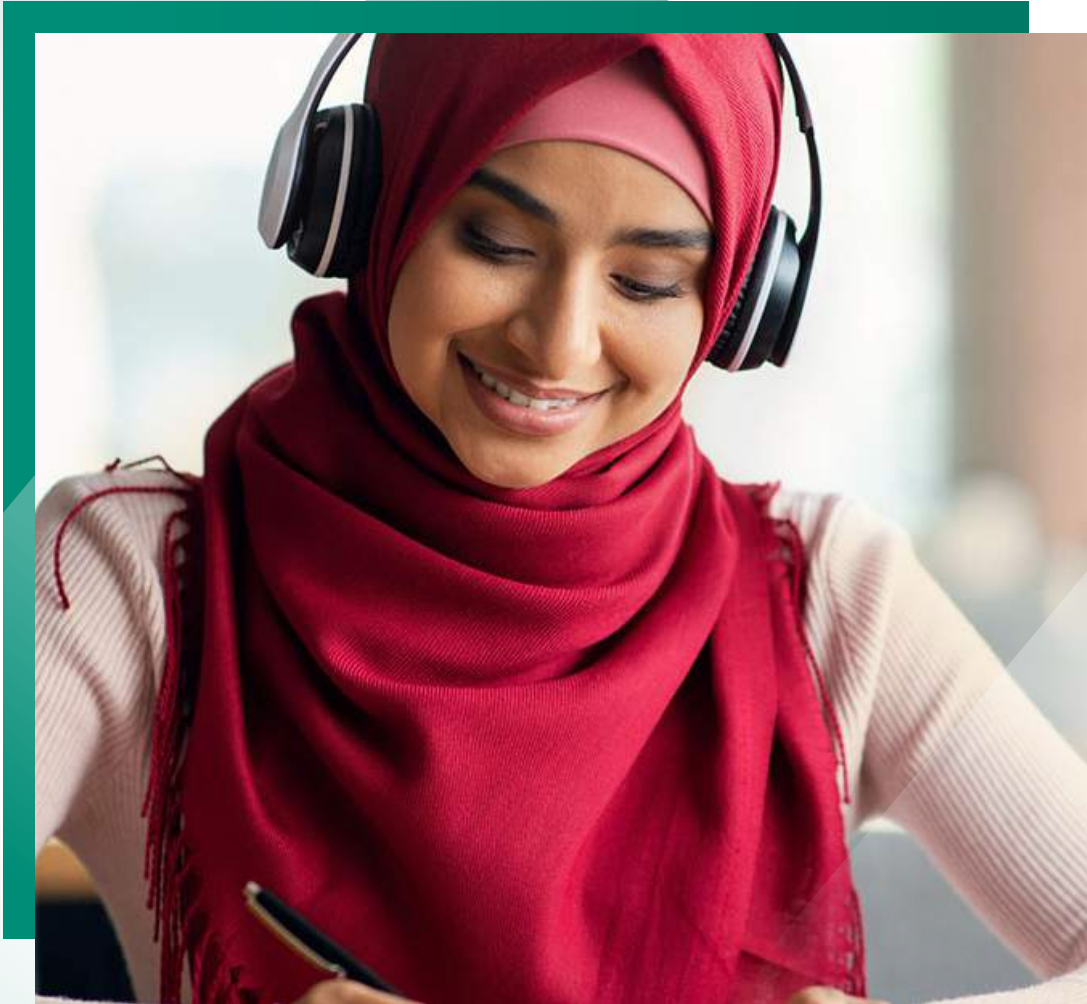
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Meeting More Family Needs with Two New Schools

The second school, GEE Compass Academy, is a K-12 cyber school that builds upon the successes of other schools in its Global Educational Excellence network. The school’s focus on equitable and culturally responsive instruction was a big appeal to families, with nearly 140 students enrolling in the first year.

The positive community response to the opening of these schools shows how Michigan families continue to seek a wide variety of public education opportunities for their children as they explore which model and pathway will best support their goals and lead to lifelong achievement. ♦

“We don’t come up with a program and then make the community adapt. Our blended learning programs look different based on the community, and we have room for flexibility to meet students’ needs.”
- Amal Issa
Director of Operations for Blended Learning



A GEE Compass Academy student working on homework.

Giving Back to Our State Through Student Volunteerism

The CSO continued to encourage volunteerism this year by developing a day-long restoration project for GVSU charter high school students in Detroit. The project was designed in collaboration with the Michigan DNR and Michigan Cares for Tourism, a 100% volunteer-driven organization where tourism professionals work together to restore historic, cultural, and natural attractions around Michigan.

On May 20, more than 100 students from University Prep Science and Math (UPSM) High School helped spruce up Belle Isle by painting buildings, planting trees, removing brush, and more. The project was the state’s official kick-off to the 2024 National Tourism Week, which attracted attention from hundreds of Michigan tourism industry professionals. The industry members joined to ensure that every UPSM student had a person to talk to and share information with, for things like job opportunities, postsecondary learning, and important adult skills.

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Volunteers clear brush alongside the Belle Isle shoreline.



Students from UPSM High School add new paint to a park shelter.

Giving Back to Our State Through Student Volunteerism

The goal of the partnership is to use restoration projects as learning spaces while helping students acquire the volunteer hours they need to graduate. Along with the insights they gained

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from industry professionals, the UPSM students also learned about the history of the park and good water safety habits. In the end, the K-12 students get an incredible experience while learning how important it is to maintain their community and its vital resources. Partnerships like this highlight what is possible through cross-department collaboration focused on helping students grow into good citizens and good neighbors. ♦



A group of volunteers head out to plant new trees on Belle Isle.

Making College a Reality for More Students

During the 2023-2024 school year, the CSO's Charter-through-College team was once again the catalyst behind a record-breaking number of GVSU charter high school students visiting, applying, and enrolling to Grand Valley.

The team's success stemmed from an expansion of activities — both on and off campus — that provided learners with more access to GVSU resources, programs, and personnel. As a result, the number of students who applied to GVSU grew by 15%, and the number admitted to the university doubled, making GVSU the top college choice for students graduating from GVSU charter high schools. The team also hosted more than 1,800 students for campus visits during the year, including the first two overnight stays the CSO has designed for middle school students.



Shelby Powell

The CSO's dedication to making higher education a reality for more students fosters an expanded, vibrant community of learners at GVSU. It furthers our mission to create an equitable learning environment where more voices and perspectives are included and enhances possibilities for future generations of lifelong learning. ♦



Visiting high school students celebrate their acceptance to GVSU.

495
Charter School Students
Admitted to GVSU
(100% increase)

GVSU
is #1
College Choice for Students in
GVSU's Charter High Schools

Providing a National Perspective on School Choice Success

GVSU believes that an inclusive and equitable community can be realized when every person has a path where they can thrive as they learn. That goal drives the CSO to continuously find new ways for its charter public schools to help more kids and to highlight stories that show how school choice can break down historic barriers.

The CSO was pleased to welcome Walter Blanks Jr., a leading voice for educational equity, to Grand Rapids in October to share more about the role that school choice played in his own K-12 journey as a student in Ohio. During his presentation, Walter shared how his academic achievement immediately improved thanks to a school choice program, eventually propelling him to college and a successful career. He also provided a national perspective of how different K-12 options across the country are helping more kids achieve academically — thanks to families and legislators exploring creative school choice pathways. He concluded his visit with a discussion with a panel of educators who have extensive backgrounds in advancing education equity within their schools.

School choice success stories like Walter's give communities a chance to learn more about the solutions that are being developed around the country and offer inspiration for what can be possible for more kids in Michigan through school choice pathways.



Walter Blanks Jr. speaking to audience members in GVSU's Loosemore Auditorium.



Walter Blanks Jr.

Meet the Charter Schools Office Team



Bill Barker
School Consultant



Leah Breen
Assistant Vice President
for Charter Schools



Matt Cawood, Ph.D.
School Consultant



Sarah Constable
Office Coordinator



Michael Cousins
Associate Director of Community Outreach



Cheryl Edwards-Cannon
School Consultant



Brooke Franklin
School Consultant



Barry Hall II, Ed.D.
Director of Charter through
College Programs



Gretchen LaHaie
Deputy Director for School Accountability



Jayme Lesperance
Manager of Educator Enrichment
and Outreach

Meet the Charter Schools Office Team



Jeff Maxwell
School Support Specialist



Clint McDaniel
School Consultant



Matt Missias, Ph.D.
School Support Specialist



Merrideth Okonkwor
School Consultant



Shelby Powell
Charter through College Specialist



Ram Ravikumar
Manager of Data Analytics



Genevieve Reside
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At Grand Valley State University, we empower learners in their pursuits, professions, and purpose. The university enriches society through excellent teaching, active scholarship, advancement of equity, and public service.

Grand Valley State University is an affirmative action, equal opportunity institution. It encourages diversity and provides equal opportunity in education, employment, all of its programs, and the use of its facilities. It is committed to protecting the constitutional and statutory civil rights of persons connected with the university. 6/24

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