

pride & pack

2025 SPRING

Preparing Students for a BRIGHT FUTURE



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The arrival of spring is a hallmark for educators everywhere as we close in on the end of an academic year. Graduation season is a time to reflect on the accomplishments of our students and the bright futures that lie ahead. As superintendents we're filled with pride and excitement as we celebrate the Class of 2025. Between Marion Independent and Linn-Mar, our districts will be celebrating 803 graduates this year!

In this edition of "Pride and Pack" we've devoted space to help our larger Marion community better understand some of the ways our districts ensure that every student graduates prepared for success in college, technical training, military, workforce and life. You'll learn more about how we partner with Kirkwood Community College and utilize innovative instruction and industry-recognized certifications to empower our students to reach their full potential. We'll also highlight programs and initiatives that provide our students with real-world skills and credentials that make them competitive in today's workforce. Whether our graduates choose to continue their education, enter the workforce, or serve in the military, we are confident that they are well-prepared for their next steps.

While this edition mainly highlights work at the high school level, our students engage in rigorous academics, hands-on learning experiences, and career-focused programs at every grade in our districts. As we celebrate our graduates, we also extend our gratitude to the families, teachers, staff, and community members who have supported them throughout their journey.

In particular we want to thank our district employees who are retiring this year, and you'll see a small acknowledgement of our gratitude in this newsletter. Your encouragement and investment in our students' futures make a profound difference.

We know that every step in our students' educational journeys are opportunities to set them up for future success, and we thank everyone in our Marion community who has celebrated them along the way.

Janelle Brouwer

Marion Independent School District
Superintendent

Amy Kortemeyer

Linn-Mar Community School District
Superintendent

Linn-Mar and Marion
Independent Class
of 2025 Graduates

Anticipated Graduates:
Linn-Mar High School

526

Anticipated Graduates:
Marion High School

180

Anticipated Graduates:
Marion Home School
Assistance Program

97

EXPANDING CAREER PATHWAYS for Marion and Linn-Mar Students

Linn-Mar and Marion Independent educators are paving pathways for student success beyond the classroom! Through innovative programs and personalized career-readiness efforts, both schools are ensuring that their students are graduating with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in education, enlistment, or employment after high school.



Career Exploration Begins in Middle School

All students attending Linn-Mar and Marion Independent begin career exploration through early learning opportunities, with a more focused approach starting in middle school. At Marion Independent, eighth grade students complete a career interest survey to begin their career exploration opportunities. Similarly, Linn-Mar eighth grade students take a high school preparation course to learn more about their interests so they can consider high school options that support their futures.

Linn-Mar Oak Ridge Middle School teacher Molly Burgeson and Linn-Mar Excelsior teacher Travis Pierson agree that the high school preparation classes not only provide students with critical knowledge but also allow them to explore their interests in a hands-on way. “These courses give students the chance to discover what they enjoy and what they might want to pursue in the future,” said Burgeson. Pierson added, “It’s about giving students the tools to make informed decisions about their future while showing them that the world is full of opportunities.”



Advancing the Process for High School Students

That eighth grade foundational work opens up opportunities at both districts to support their high school students with career exploration by providing them with tools for self-exploration, career research and academic planning.

“A Wolf’s Calling” is Marion Independent’s innovative program designed to guide students toward meaningful futures. By connecting students with the 16 career paths, this initiative ensures that every learner has access to tailored opportunities, including specialized coursework, job shadows, internships, service learning, Kirkwood Academies, and industry-recognized credentials. “Marion High School has set an ambitious goal: By 2027, every student will complete a capstone experience before graduation. This culminating project will showcase students’ skills, knowledge, and hands-on experience, ensuring they leave MHS fully prepared for their next step—whether that’s college, trade school, or entering the workforce directly,” said Marion High School Counselor, Tom Kettmann.

Similarly, Linn-Mar’s counseling team helps students plan for their futures using Xello, an online career and college readiness platform. This tool helps students plan their high school courses based on their goals after high school graduation.

By fostering career awareness at early ages, our local public school districts are equipping students with the awareness and confidence to learn more about the programs and classes that will prepare them for life after school.

Classroom Learning Leading to **SKILLED CREDENTIALS**

Both districts provide advanced learning opportunities for students through their daily schedules, with many of these opportunities preparing the students to earn industry-recognized credentials.

Linn-Mar Community School District and Marion Independent School District are among the local school districts that have partnered with Kirkwood Community College to offer Career Academies, providing students with opportunities to explore high-demand careers while earning both high school and college credit. These academies are designed to help students develop new skills and gain insights into today's workplace, and provide students with an opportunity to earn both high school and college credits while preparing for advanced programs or entering the workforce.

Let's take a closer look at just a few of the programs available at Linn-Mar and Marion Independent school districts that help propel our students forward.



a nationally recognized food safety training and certification program designed to educate food service workers on proper food handling, sanitation, and safety. Completing this certification can help students move on to culinary careers or additional certifications.



Food Service Industry- ServSafe Certification

Just inside the north entrance at Linn-Mar High School you'll find students whisking and chopping in an industrial-grade kitchen. Many students take basic courses as early as their freshman year, and older students can pursue electives allowing them to explore more advanced food service equipment, techniques and safety. The district also has integrated an optional advanced certification into its curriculum, providing students with valuable ServSafe credentials that enhance their employability in the food service industry. ServSafe is



Construction Trades- Pre-Apprenticeship

Partnering with Habitat for Humanity gives Marion High School students real-world construction experience while making a meaningful impact in their community. Plus, the industry-recognized credential training available for these students sets them up for future career success. Additionally, students have the opportunity to participate in construction

SKILLED CREDENTIALS



trade pre-apprenticeship, where Marion Independent students work alongside skilled professionals, gaining hands-on experience on real job sites. Through this pre-apprenticeship opportunity, they develop essential skills, build industry connections, and take the first steps toward a rewarding career in the trades.



Education- Paraeducator Certification

Linn-Mar sophomores, juniors, and seniors can take courses through its Exploring Education program to learn skills and strategies that help them work with children. Students can take classes on topics like child development, teaching methods, and this year also can learn through supervised experiences in teaching. Students enrolled in this program earn dual credits applicable toward both high school graduation and Kirkwood Community College requirements.

Manufacturing and Welding - OSHA, AWS and NIMS Credentials

Marion High School and Linn-Mar students are stepping into the future of advanced manufacturing through the Advanced Manufacturing and Welding Academy at Kirkwood Community College. Taught by industry experts, this career

academy experience equips students with real-world skills in manufacturing, robotics, and welding. Upon completing the program, students will have the opportunity to enter a registered apprenticeship, gaining valuable on-the-job experience while continuing their education. This pathway not only provides a direct connection to industry professionals but also opens doors to long-term career success in the growing field of advanced manufacturing.

Students who complete the Advanced Manufacturing and Welding Academy can take their skills to the next level through welding pre-apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships, where they gain real-world experience and earn a salary while they learn on-the-job and take the next step toward a high-demand career.

Health Sciences- Certified Nurse Assistant Certification

Students in both districts can take significant steps toward careers in healthcare by successfully completing the Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) Training Program at Kirkwood Community College. This rigorous program equips students with



the essential skills and knowledge to provide direct care for residents in long-term care facilities across Iowa. Through hands-on training and classroom instruction, students learn to ensure proper resident safety, hygiene, and nutrition while delivering compassionate care. Upon completing the CNA program, these students will have the opportunity to further their careers by entering a registered apprenticeship. This next step allows them to gain valuable on-the-job experience while continuing their education, paving the way for long-term success in nursing and other healthcare professions.

Health Sciences- Mercy Hospital Partnership

Another healthcare career pathway is available through Marion Economic Development Corporation's (MEDCO) Community Promise initiative. MEDCO partners with Marion Independent School District, Linn-Mar Community School District, Kirkwood Community College, and Mercy Medical Center in Cedar Rapids to introduce job opportunities in healthcare. Community Promise is a program powered by MEDCO that promotes high-demand careers and develops pathways for students to pursue those careers in the community. The student experience at Mercy Medical Center is geared to students who have expressed interest in healthcare



by partaking in a Kirkwood Community College Academy while still in high school. This opportunity is focused on careers within a hospital including a patient care tech, patient nutrition assistant, room service specialist, transporter and on skills like equipment sterilization, imaging and others.



During the 2023-24 school year, 55 Linn-Mar High School students and 50 Marion High School students dove into hands-on learning at Kirkwood Regional Center, exploring 11 and 14 different career academies, respectively. Through this exciting partnership, students gained real-world experience to set the stage for their future careers!



Career Exploration, Job Shadow, and Internship Opportunities

In partnership with MEDCO, Kirkwood, and area businesses, both Linn-Mar and Marion Independent provide a wide range of opportunities for students to complete a job shadow, internship, or career exploration experience. During the 2024-25 school year, students at Marion Independent will complete over 300 job shadows, with a projection of 60 percent of the eligible student body completing at least one job shadow during the school year. Additionally, every graduating senior will complete one or more job shadow experiences while in high school. Similarly, this academic year students at Linn-Mar High School will have completed 405 job shadows and 35 internships.

This would not be possible without the tremendous support from our local community and business partners welcoming a new generation of prospective employees.

Building for the Future:

FACILITY UPDATES FROM LINN-MAR AND MARION INDEPENDENT

Marion Independent School District and Linn-Mar Community School District are making significant strides in enhancing their facilities to better serve students, staff and the community. From updated classroom spaces to improved infrastructure projects to new, modern spaces, these improvements reflect a commitment to providing high-quality education.

Setting a Stage For Performances

Marion Independent unveiled the new 760 seat auditorium in February when it hosted a premier concert, featuring performances from a wide variety of Marion High School performing arts groups. The venue has also been in use for elementary students with an author visit, the Marion Masquerade show choir event, and spring musicals.

Linn-Mar continues to move forward with construction on its new performance venue. Located along 10th Street

in Marion, this new space is located at Linn-Mar High School and will seat 1,200. Construction of this venue is progressing on schedule and will soon be home to Linn-Mar concerts, theater, music, speech, dance and other performances. This project is projected to be completed by this winter.

PPEL and SAVE Funds at Work

During the summer months, both Linn-Mar and Marion Independent are actively involved in ongoing facility maintenance projects made possible

through PPEL and SAVE funds.

Although the projects may not seem as exciting as some of the new facilities, they are a critical part of ongoing maintenance to ensure facilities are safe places to serve students and families in the larger Marion community.

› This summer, Marion Independent plans to complete two larger scale projects. The high school campus exterior brick walls require recladding, and this summer will include the second phase of this project. Also at the high school campus, an HVAC project this summer includes replacement of an Air Handling Unit (AHU).

› Linn-Mar will be updating the membrane roof on the Excelsior Middle School this summer. The project is scheduled to begin after school releases for the summer and be completed before students return in the fall.



Balcony seating in Linn-Mar's new performance venue.



Linn-Mar's new performance venue will support high school students in vocal music, band, jazz band, orchestra, and the performing arts.



A center stage view of the Marion Performing Arts Center.



Marion student performance in the Marion Masquerade Show Choir Invitational.



The new space has already been used for a variety of events like this visit with author John Patrick Green, coordinated by Swamp Fox Bookstore.

Partnership Brings Playground to Marion Neighborhood

Thanks in part to a partnership with the City of Marion, Wilkins Elementary will be making a big step toward enhancing its playground! This project will bring together funding from the City and Linn-Mar, along with additional support from the Wilkins Elementary PTO. This partnership provides an upgrade for the neighborhood surrounding Taube Park, and will ensure Wilkins students have a new space to exercise and play.

Marion Plans for Starry Site



Marion Independent School Board, in partnership with OPN Architects, continues to work on plans for the future use of the Starry site, which currently is in use for storage after the building was vacated

with the opening of Parkview Elementary in August 2024.

Starry Elementary was built in 1959, followed by two additions to the building in 1965 and in 1998. The 1959 section is the center portion of the building, with the 1965 addition to the south nearest the current playground area, and the 1998 addition to the north, which includes a gym, office spaces, and classrooms. The Marion Independent administration and Board of Directors continue to consider plans for the Starry site as part of the district's long range planning for the high school campus. At the time of this publication, the Board has approved the bid for Phase 1A and 1B renovations, to be completed for the start of the 2025-26 school year. The remaining two phases have not yet been approved, finalized or scheduled.

- Phase 1A and 1B: include renovation of a small section of the 1998 addition of the building to house the Marion Transition Center and the Food Pantry, which is supported by students from the Marion Transition Center and other Marion Independent High School students.
- Phase 2: Renovation of the remainder of the 1998 addition for relocation of district offices. This would vacate current space at the Marion Independent High School campus to allow for future renovation/expansion for high school program needs.
- Phase 3: Demolition of the 1959 and 1965 sections of the building.

Based on an assessment of the facility, the older two sections of the building are planned for short term storage and are under consideration for long range demolition. The 1998 section of the building remains in usable condition, although it will require some renovation and code updates for long term use.

Jump Starting Their Futures: Earning College Credit in High School



Working in partnership with area school districts, Kirkwood Community College Credit in High School (CCHS) program is another way for high school students to gain career-related, hands-on experience while experiencing the rigor of college-level course work. Students taking these classes take courses that count for both college and high school credit at no cost to the student or the student's family. A variety of liberal arts and career and technical education (CTE) classes are available onsite at area high schools, Kirkwood locations, and online.

Unique Students Participating By Term

	Linn-Mar High School	Marion High School
Fall, 2022	381	142
Spring, 2023	328	198
Fall, 2023	387	190
Spring, 2024	342	205

Twenty-seven percent of all Linn-Mar High School students participated in concurrent enrollment courses, and 32 percent of students who took courses earned 12 or more credit hours. At Marion High School, 35 percent of the students participated in concurrent enrollment with 33 percent of those participating earning 12 or more college credit hours.

This partnership, based on Kirkwood's tuition rate for 2023-24, saved Linn-Mar families \$849,345 and Marion Independent families \$758,000 last year.



MISD Retirees



Linn-Mar Retirees

SCHOOL DISTRICT *Retirees!*

Thank you to the employees at
Linn-Mar Community and Marion Independent
school districts who are retiring this year.
Your dedication, passion, and hard work have shaped
countless lives, and we are forever grateful!
As you step into this exciting new chapter,
we celebrate your years of service
and the lasting impact you've made.