

# School NEWS



SUMMER 2021

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**PARENTS AS TEACHERS REACHES  
NEW FAMILIES**

**OLATHE WEST VIRTUAL PEP ASSEMBLY**

**BENTWOOD ELEMENTARY CELEBRATES  
BLACK HISTORY MONTH WITH MURAL**

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# *A Message From* **SUPERINTENDENT JOHN ALLISON**



It's hard to believe that this is my final *School News* message and final opportunity to share a few thoughts with the greater Olathe community. As many of you know, I have announced my retirement from the school district at the end of this school year.

I have loved my time in Olathe and am proud of the great things we have been able to accomplish during my time here. While I am retiring from being a superintendent, I plan to never stop learning and working to support public education.

Here are some of the things I have learned and loved about the Olathe Public Schools:

1. The staff is extraordinary. I have been blown away by the innovation, the passion, the dedication the Olathe staff has for students and the students are better because of these amazing individuals.
2. The community support is incredible. I've lived in other communities and have never seen such a supportive

community. That support truly impacts the schools and makes them better for kids.

3. The families in Olathe are supportive and always push to make education better. This level of involvement from families in Olathe makes this a very special place.
4. Most importantly, the students are second to none. I have loved getting the chance to know students in the district and watch them learn and grow. I know our students will go on to great things.

I want to thank you for all the support you have provided me during my time here. The district is in great hands with Dr. Brent Yeager taking the helm in July. I cannot wait to see all the good that is to come.

Thank you for your support of the Olathe Public Schools.

**John Allison,**  
**Superintendent**

## *In This Issue...*

**Olathe Public Schools** 14160 S. Black Bob Road, Olathe, KS 66063  
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# PARENTS AS TEACHERS REACHES NEW FAMILIES

*The* Parents As Teachers (PAT) program serves the district's youngest students long before they arrive in a classroom. Parents As Teachers is a national program that has been part of the Olathe School District for over 25 years and serves families with children from birth to age 3. Its mission is to help parents understand their role in encouraging their child's development from the very beginning. Children don't come with instructions and parents have questions so PAT educators are here to help.

Strengthened with a research-based curriculum and fun parent-child interaction activities, the PAT staff meets monthly with families.

"We know parents are the experts on their children. We are there to share the latest research on child development and parenting while being the family's cheerleader," said Jenny Whitney, PAT parent educator and 2020 National Parent Educator of the Year.

In addition to answering questions on topics such as feeding, sleep and discipline, PAT educators conduct health and developmental assessments to make sure children are on track.



In a pre-2020 event, Superintendent John Allison served as a guest reader to families.

"Parents As Teachers makes us a little better at parenting with every visit," parent Jessie Fluke said. "Not only do we learn valuable developmental information and new fun ways to play with our kids, but our parent educator is always there to listen and problem solve any situation we may be experiencing."



Parents as Teachers strives to help parents understand their role in encouraging their child's development.

"Birth to age 5 has been a real area of focus for our community," Olathe Public Schools Assistant Director of Early Childhood Kim Hawkins said. "I am so proud of the continuum of services available for our youngest learners. Olathe families and children are in good hands with Olathe PAT as the foundation."

The program also offers group connections where parents are invited to learn and play with their children while interacting with other families.

The pandemic has changed the look of some PAT events, but it certainly hasn't stopped them. PAT Coordinator Dorothy Hiatt said that during COVID-19, Olathe Parents as Teachers has continued to serve families through virtual service delivery methods.



During the pandemic, Parents as Teachers served families with virtual events.

"Parent educators have found that the support and developmental information they provide to families is even more important now due to the challenges of social distancing and stay-at-home orders," Hiatt said. "By offering virtual home visits, playgroups and group connections, parent educators have continued to stay connected to families and to keep families connected to one another."

Olathe PAT earned the prestigious Blue Ribbon Affiliate status in 2020 and continues to strive to offer excellent services with the belief that parents are their child's first and most important teachers. Any family with a child from birth to 36 months is encouraged to enroll for this free program.

"PAT has been instrumental in our parenting journey," parent Kayla Nonnast said. "As a first-time mom, I didn't realize how many questions I would have about sleep, physical and mental development, and behavior. PAT is such an excellent resource for us in those areas and beyond. I tell all of my expecting friends that they must sign up."

Learn more or enroll at [www.olatheschools.org/pat](http://www.olatheschools.org/pat).

# PANORAMA: TOOL HELPS EDUCATORS UNDERSTAND STUDENT SOCIAL- EMOTIONAL LEARNING NEEDS



*Every* educator knows that when a student’s basic physical, social and emotional needs aren’t met, it makes learning that much harder, if not impossible. One important way the Olathe Public Schools staff work to meet social and emotional needs is with the assistance of tool called Panorama.

Panorama is a survey students take about their own perception of their social and emotional well-being. It is a research-based tool that is used at schools across the country and helps district staff monitor social and emotional learning. Social-emotional learning skills are social skills that allow people to cope in society and self-regulate to manage emotions. They are the soft, non-academic skills that make them well-rounded students. In Olathe, the Panorama survey seeks perceptions about things with school such as school safety, sense of belonging, and student and teacher relationships. It also measures things about self, such as emotional regulation, social awareness, grit, and coping with anxiety. Students are surveyed at least twice per year in grades 3-12.

With the pandemic, changes to school learning environments and all the change and uneasiness that has come from COVID-19 and this school year, assessing students through Panorama has been even more important than ever.

Students were assessed in the fall and winter this school year. Director of Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health Services Angie Salava said they have been pleased to see an

improvement in student responses around positive relationships with teachers and connection to school, which in turn she feels has led to improvement in coping with anxiety.

“We’ve seen an improvement in coping with anxiety,” Salava said. “It’s still an issue but has been increasing steadily. The big way to help in this area is to make sure that every student has one adult in the school they are comfortable with and feel connected to. It’s vital to make sure we are building relationships before jumping into the academics.”

Other areas of improvement were in school safety, student relationships, and cultural awareness and action.

Panorama provides data to the district that helps drive decision-making around mental health and other programming to help give students the skills they need to be successful in school. Panorama works in partnership with staff and these programs and initiatives to provide data to make sure staff are directing help and resources in the best direction for student need.

“As a district we can monitor for trends in data,” Salava said. “One area where we are seeing declines is student emotional regulation. This will be an area staff focus to help give students the skills they need to be successful. This data is difficult to mine when just looking at grades, attendance and behavior. It helps us take a look at our students to see where, as a whole, they might need more help.”



# OLATHE WEST VIRTUAL PEP ASSEMBLY

To help create a sense of normalcy during a unique school year, staff at Olathe West High School desired to establish a safe atmosphere for celebrating student achievement. A hallowed high school tradition, pep assemblies have long been the embodiment of excitement and school spirit.

In mid-February, while secondary students were still in the hybrid learning mode, West staff members Jay Novacek, Doug Kapeller, Josh Umphrey and Kelsey Carbajo dreamed big and laid groundwork for a virtual pep assembly. The assembly would allow students to safely distance in their classrooms while watching the assembly live on TV screens. The only catch was having to repeat the task for afternoon hybrid students.

Kapeller and Umphrey met with Tony Rangel, Olathe Public Schools video production specialist, and numerous district tech staff members to lay the groundwork. Carbajo led the student leadership group, The OWLS, in creating an outline for the event. In the end, more than 50 people were involved in creating this event.

“Students were the heart of this assembly,” Umphrey said. “They ran cameras, sound and teleprompters. Our kids produced an industry-level event.”

Live feeds were intermixed with taped video packages of performances and introductions. Students were chosen to represent class levels in a half-court shot competition at the end of the assembly. There was also a live poll to determine which teacher would receive a pie to the face.

“A key element of making this a success was that a student hit a half-court shot during the assembly,” Novacek said. “This was a huge hit with the students.”

Students watched band and drill team performances, along with student recognitions. According to Umphrey, students only had a few hours of practice and were motivated to exceed expectations.



Students produced the live events using state-of-the-art video equipment.

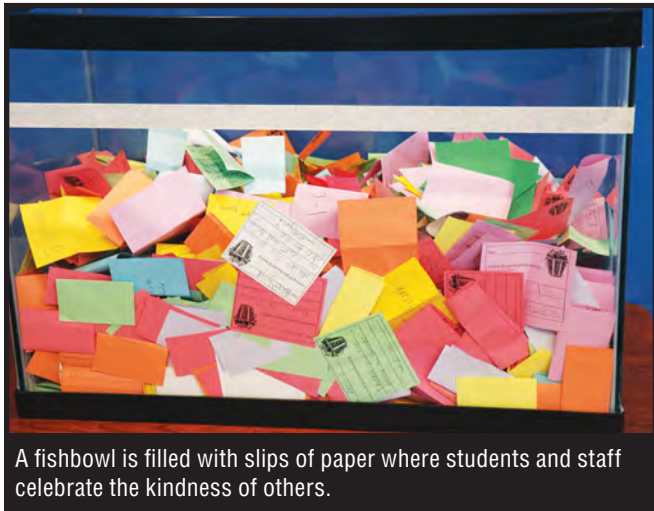


Assistant Principal Josh Umphrey works with students during the virtual assembly.

“Many of our freshmen have never attended a high school assembly yet,” Umphrey said. “We had heard from many students about how excited they were to be at West. Everyone was asking how we were able to pull off the event.”

“The West administration is awesome,” Kapeller said. “They trusted that outside the box ideas would work. We took a risk and it paid off.”

# CLEARWATER CREEK FOCUSES ON THE POSITIVE ON THEIR WELLNESS WEDNESDAYS



A fishbowl is filled with slips of paper where students and staff celebrate the kindness of others.

*During* a year that has been challenging in many ways, helping kids find the joy and the good in the tough is a focus at Clearwater Creek Elementary. The school started Wellness Wednesdays this winter where the focus is on wellness and celebrating the positive.

Each week students learn an important wellness lesson, including many key skills around social-emotional learning. From the importance of getting enough sleep at night to having a growth mindset, the Clearwater Creek Coyotes have worked hard. Taking it one step further, they have looked for the good in one another, filling buckets with slips of paper, sharing when they see a staff member or students being kind and doing the right thing.

Comments range from: “Thank you for playing with me at recess,” to “You helped me when I needed it,” to “You were respectful to our substitute teacher.” The students and staff at Clearwater Creek are watching and celebrating.

It’s making a positive impact on the building, Principal Nate Kremer said.

“It’s been fun to see it take off,” Kremer said. “It’s an important skill to learn at the elementary level to flip the mindset and look for the good things.”



Clearwater Creek Principal Nate Kremer celebrates a good deed with a student on Wellness Wednesday.

The classroom buckets of positive notes go into a large fishbowl in the office. Once that fishbowl is filled, the school celebrates with a school-wide pajama day. Additionally, Kremer picks out three messages each week and calls the students to the office to celebrate their kind deed. They also call home to the parents to let them know their child was nominated.

Stephanie Stone, a third grade teacher at Clearwater Creek, has loved watching the kids embrace Wellness Wednesdays. She’s had a few students chosen from the class as a weekly winner and the entire class gets excited for their peer.

“This really has helped the kids understand that this year has been challenging for everybody, but it’s the way we choose to handle it that sets the tone,” Stone said. “Looking for the best in others can help you feel better.”





Quila Haynes and Courtney Kraus share a moment with their display.

# BENTWOOD ELEMENTARY CELEBRATES BLACK HISTORY MONTH WITH MURAL

*In* the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools looked to create a sense of normalcy by safely reintroducing pre-pandemic activities. Bentwood Elementary created action teams to engage staff and students in their school community. One team was tasked with creating safe school assemblies and celebrations.

“As a Leader in Me School, we believe all staff and students are leaders. Our goal has been to take the ceiling off for our staff members to access and celebrate their genius,” Bentwood Principal Sharon Ingebrand said. Autism paraeducator Quila Haynes was tapped to serve on the school assembly team, and with energy and passion, Haynes quickly brought a new idea to the table.

“During one of our meetings, we discussed having a serious moment at an assembly,” Haynes said. “I asked if we could have moments in Black history. Being a woman of color is very important to me and I just ran with it.”

Haynes and autism teacher Courtney Kraus worked together and created a mural of the Black History Periodic Table. Kraus saw a photo of something similar on social media and took the idea to Haynes.

“Quila was so excited and emotionally touched, her enthusiasm was very contagious,” Ingebrand said. Students and

staff quickly loved the display and became excited to engage and learn.

“It’s really cool that students who had no idea who any of the people were, are now interested in learning more,” Haynes said. “I hope this is something that can continue in our school and in our district for years to come.”

“The biggest part of this experience for me has been seeing the impact this has had on our team. We have several paras of other ethnicities and races and the diversity is beautiful,” said Kraus. “To watch them build and interact with this display has been such a source of joy in a very difficult time.”

“I’m very pleased and overjoyed,” said Haynes. “When Courtney showed me the photo and being able to incorporate myself into the periodic table has been such a blessing.

“My hope is for people to see how important it is to celebrate these heroes and have a better understanding of Black culture,” said Haynes. “Representation is very important and I feel like this table represents students we have in this building. This project represents history and life. Anything is possible and the table represents never giving up and being proud of who you are. Don’t be discouraged because of the color of your skin as all things are possible.”





Quila Haynes celebrates mural.

The biggest part of this experience for me has been seeing the impact this has had on our team. We have several paras of other ethnicities and races and the diversity is beautiful. To watch them build and interact with this display has been such a source of joy in a very difficult time.

- Courtney Kraus  
Olathe Public School Autism Teacher

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