School NEWS



WINTER 2020



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A Message From SUPERINTENDENT JOHN ALLISON



One thing that struck me when I started my job in Olathe in 2017 is the incredible support from our parents and community. This community wraps its arms around the district and its students. We are so fortunate to have such strong support from the city, county, local businesses, civic organizations and faith-based partners.

One question we are getting a lot of right now from our amazing community is: How can I help? Right now, the best way to help the Olathe Public Schools is to sign up to be a substitute teacher in our schools. As we navigate COVID-19 and follow county quarantine guidelines, there are times when we are in need of substitutes to work in our amazing classrooms.

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Sincerely,

John Allison, Superintendent

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DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAM KICKS OFF AT TWO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Walking into Melissa Thorsell's kindergarten class, you are greeted with smiling, happy faces of 5- and 6-year-olds excited to learn. As they settle into their spots on the carpet at circle time, they watch, captivated by their teacher greeting them in Spanish. Their morning is filled with engaging activities learning math, science and social studies all in Spanish. Halfway through their day, the students switch to an English kindergarten class in Allysa Reck's room and the other group comes into Thorsell's room for Spanish kindergarten.

These students are part of the district's brand-new dual language immersion program that opened this school year at Black Bob and Manchester Park elementary schools. Research shows that students who take part in an immersion classroom consistently develop native-like levels of comprehension, such as listening and reading skills, in their second language. Students learn science, social studies, and math in both Spanish and English throughout the day.

Despite an unusual start with elementary kids spending the first few weeks of school in a hybrid format, the school year is off to a great start and the immersion students are thriving.

"The students are interacting and responding in the Spanish immersion classrooms," said World Language Coordinator Michael Flenthrope. "Students are not just learning the kindergarten curriculum, they are doing it in two languages. It is amazing to observe their interactions and participation in the classroom."

Reck teaches with Thorsell at Black Bob. Reck teaches students during the English portion of their day. She said she loves when her students come back from their Spanish time, excited to share the new Spanish words they have learned.

"They are really excited to use their Spanish and I often hear them using it in my English classroom while we are reading books and reviewing math concepts," Reck said. "We also hear them out at recess."

"Other kids throughout the building are also starting to use a little bit of Spanish when they talk to me," Thorsell said. "I look forward to watching them continue to learn and apply their knowledge as the year progresses."

Teachers at Manchester Park are also



noticing the excitement of students and how quickly they are picking up on the new language.

"Every day they are learning new things and adding to their Spanish vocabulary," said Lindsey Fuzzell, who teaches the English part of the immersion day at Manchester Park. Yolanda Wright-Calderon teaches the Spanish part of the immersion kindergarten at Manchester Park. "It's an amazing opportunity for our students not only to learn a new language but the culture and customs as well," Fuzzell said.

This year's 87 kindergarten immersion students will stay in the immersion program as it grows at Black Bob and Manchester Park. Next year, a new set of immersion teachers will be added at each school for first grade to continue to grow the program.

"This program has started out as such a great success due to the teachers, administrators, students and the supportive parents," Flenthrope said. "Everyone has played a part in its early success and we are looking forward to its future."







School News staff had the opportunity to connect with Cody Janousek, facilitator of the Green Tech Academy which is located at Olathe West High School. Janousek and the academy work to create green energy solutions for the school and the surrounding community.

Recently you had the opportunity of speaking at a United States Congress briefing about the Green Tech Academy. How did this opportunity come about and what was it like?

Janousek: I was contacted by Amber Todoroff with the Environmental and Energy Study Institute. She had heard about our academy and being that there are not many programs in the United States where students are learning about renewable energy all four years of high school, she was interested. This led to the congressional briefing on workforce development.

It's certainly not every day that you brief Congress, and after the interview there were a few people who followed up with me. Being able to talk to them about the Green Tech Academy was great. Overall I'm encouraged by the level of expertise being devoted to developing our renewable energy workforce and that Congress is thinking about the future for these issues.

As part of a briefing series called Workforce Wednesdays, you were on a panel that discussed preparing high school students for green careers. What are some of the most important topics that were discussed?

Janousek: Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are aimed at preparing students for technical careers after high school. The Green Tech Academy, like many traditional CTE programs, uses innovative technology to address skills our future workforce needs. Since so much of what we do is aimed at getting our students technical careers after high school, on the panel I discussed our relationship with the Green Tech Advisory Board. This group determines what skills are most relevant to the industry they represent and goals for academy students, whether it be use of cutting-edge technology, instructional strategies, physical environment or professional development.

How are these topics being addressed in the Green Tech Academy?

Janousek: The best way to address these topics is to expose students to career options. They should all know that if they don't want to go to a traditional university, there are plenty of high-paying, high-demand careers available which are related to Green Tech. Secondly, I have students explore a lot of different skills. My

goal is to challenge them to solve problems.

As students seek post-secondary and career and technical education (CTE) options following high school, what are some career paths for students in the green tech field?

Janousek: Graduates of the Green Tech Academy have a large variety of options. Directly out of high school, students can become HVAC technicians, lineworkers or solar installers. These are high-demand positions that are necessary for a transition to renewable energy, which also happen to pay well.

With additional education at a community or technical college, Green Tech students can advance to become wind turbine technicians, drone pilots, substation repair technicians or an agriculture worker. Many of these fields are currently experiencing rapid growth and after a few years in the professional field, students could find themselves making a decent salary with very little college debt.

Students can always explore getting a degree at a traditional university. Whether it's fields such as mechanical or chemical engineering, or new areas of environmental engineering, students can learn about the engineering process in Green Tech in every project they do. Many career avenues could utilize what we learn in Green Tech.

Olathe West High School is one of the few Energy Star-Rated school buildings in Kansas and recently won a \$5,000 grant for teachers in Olathe to receive professional development on environmental and energy education. Can you speak to the work being done and its importance?

Janousek: When Olathe West was being built there was a design emphasis on energy efficiency and sustainability and having our building be an Energy Star-Rated building means all the appliances, lighting and HVAC systems in our school are considered energy efficient. The fact not many other buildings have this designation means it is no small feat.

The \$5,000 grant provided training for district teachers on how to conduct energy audits through project-based learning and how to access a variety of resources needed to conduct the audits. In the original vision of this grant, the schools that feed into West would have a Green Team that conducted energy and recycling audits. Recently, we've had West students conduct these audits and the changes recommended by students saved a great deal of money.

For more information about the Green Tech Academy or any of the 21st Century Academies, visit https://www.olatheschools.org/21stcenturyacademies.



DISTRICT PLACES EMPHASIS ON MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

An integral part of educating the whole student involves equipping students with the tools necessary to maintain positive mental health and access to therapeutic services. A tiered approach to providing mental health services involves community partnerships and early intervention. The following list provides a glimpse of services available to students and/or families in-person or remotely.

School Counseling Services

All Olathe Public Schools buildings have school counselors. School counselors provide support in three topic areas: academic support, college and career support, and personal emotional support. In addition, school counselors provide lessons and programming in all of these areas. School counselors are a great place to start when a family wants to know what school-based services are the best for their child.

Clinical Counseling Services

Individual and group clinical counseling services are available in all schools. Parents who would like their child to receive counseling can request services. Many different providers can provide these services in our schools. Providers who deliver these services are student wellness advocates, contract therapists, mental health liaisons, family therapy interns, social workers, and school psychologists. Most services are free of charge. The school counselor can help parents match with the provider who would be best for their student.

Family Therapeutic Services

Families counseling services are available in some schools. These services are provided by family therapy interns. In addition, mental health liaisons can connect with families to wrap around services provided by Johnson County Mental Health. Most services are free of charge.

HELP Clinic

The Olathe Public Schools HELP Clinic provides counseling services after school hours. Individual or group counseling services are provided by Olathe Public Schools mental health providers and are free of charge.

Mental Health Programs or Student Groups

All high school students receive suicide-prevention lessons through the SOS - Signs of Suicide program. Many middle and high school students also receive suicide-prevention programming through SOS - Sources of Strength. All pre-K through eighth grade students receive social emotional learning through the Second Step curriculum.

Community Education Nights

These forums are held once a quarter on topics related to mental health or parenting. In 2020, these events are being held virtually. Past topics have included student anxiety, parenting students with special needs, adolescent emotional wellness and substance abuse.

For more information regarding these services, please contact your school. You matter and we're glad you're here.

REMOTE LEARNING STUDENTS ENGAGE AND INSPIRE

The pandemic has forced teachers and school districts across the country to shift, change and adjust how teaching and learning is conducted as education has moved to remote learning formats. In July, parents in the Olathe Public Schools were given the choice of in-person or remote learning for their children. Due to numbers of cases in the community, secondary schools in the district started in a remote learning format for in-person students and moved to hybrid learning in mid-October.

As the learning needs and format changed and evolved, so did our teachers, constantly striving to find the best ways to reach kids and keep them engaged in their education.

"I am constantly reminding myself this situation is temporary, and although not ideal, I am going to make the most of it," Olathe East High School Spanish teacher Shelley Bright said. "I am very grateful to have an amazing department that supports each other and have colleagues across the district to collaborate with to create meaningful lessons for our students."

Bright said communication and relationships are important as she works to build rapport with her students.

"I think communicating to my students that I am here to support them, even more so during this time, and that they know we are doing this together has allowed them to buy into me and my class, which helps with engagement," Bright said. "I am very vulnerable and honest with them and I laugh a lot. I try my best to relate to their lives."

Claire Heigele, an Olathe East freshman, has appreciated her teachers' willingness to take suggestions and make adjustments to make class even more powerful.

"I also find creating FlipGrids has been very engaging because the students get to talk and react to each other's posts and we get helpful feedback from our teacher, which helps us both build relationships with people and expand our minds," Claire said. From making sure students take a brain break and get a chance to stretch, to sharing fun and interesting videos, to checking in on students, teachers are finding new and creative ways to reach kids and keep them engaged in learning.

Chisholm Trail Middle School seventh grader Bella Gandini has been impressed by her teachers focusing on making sure their students are doing OK.

"She gives us brain breaks to get us active to focus on a new skill that we are learning that day," Bella said. "She helps with our





mental health and makes sure we are all OK. She goes above and beyond to communicate with all of her students and their families. She makes me feel important and recognizes my hard work."

Teachers are sharing ideas, tips and tricks with their colleagues in their buildings and across the district.

"I work very hard to engage my students and am constantly trying to improve in this," Chisholm Trail English/Language Arts teacher Shelly Todd said. "I've always tried to teach with a lot of opportunities to move with a variety of activities. This is even more important online. My 50-minute class is broken down into at least four activities including reading time, a check in or reteach, a brain break, mini lesson, and finally work time. My goal is always to be the teacher that I wish I had in middle school."

Director of Blended Learning T.J. Ulmer has been amazed by teachers from across the system who have worked incredibly hard

to reach their students online. From the kindergarten teacher who is helping students navigate school, as well as a remote education at the same time; to the high school teacher working to keep students engaged in rigorous subjects, district teachers are meeting the needs of kids, no matter the learning format.

"I'm really proud of the staff and the people who have worked hard to help kids," Ulmer said. "There has been really positive feedback from our families and kids are learning and growing."









A standing tradition at Santa Fe Trail Middle School is establishing leaders and providing an opportunity for crucial conversations. Each year during fall and spring teacher conferences, students receive the opportunity to lead conversations between their parents/guardians and teachers. Sometimes these conversations are with a team of four teachers from core classes.

Former Santa Fe Trail principal Kerry Lane knew they wanted to engage middle school students in the process. Having a student voice in the conference process helped everyone see the greater picture. "When students felt a plan was happening with them vs. to them," said Lane, now principal at Olathe East High School, "we saw greater success in the classroom."

Continuing the tradition was important to current Santa Fe Trail principal JJ Libal. "In typical school years, we have the first day of conferences dedicated to student-led conferences," Libal said. "You'll see the 'arena style' conference in day two, but students take the lead in the first day."

Before conferences commence, teachers work with students regarding typical talking points such as areas of progress, goals and where the student has room for improvement. When the group converges, students lead through the material and teachers can chime in and speak to what the student is saying. "This provides ownership and understanding for our students," Libal said. "Our students handle this really well and our parents really enjoy hearing from their kids."

"This approach allows the student to guide the meeting with their voice and provides ownership of the past and setting future goals," Santa Fe Trail teacher Amy Hillman said. "We have found that the parents and guardians are incredibly engaged with the process as

their scholar is celebrating or having to acknowledge that there is need for growth."

Parents enjoy the conference style too as attendance has increased compared to previous years.

To maintain attendance for the arena style conferences days, passports are given to parents to encourage visiting multiple teachers. "We've also been able to provide drawing tickets for prizes," Libal said. "Parents receive a ticket after completing so many visits and then students are entered for items donated by local partners or SFT or Olathe North swag."

As this school year created logistical changes for typical face-to-face conferences, Santa Fe Trail staff were able to move with the flow and alter fall conferences. "To say this year was different would be a bit of an understatement," said Drew Thomas, Santa Fe Trail assistant principal.

Teams of teachers joined parents and students via Zoom to discuss student progress. These virtual conferences were typically moderated by a teacher and then the student furthered the discussion. "Our staff worked so hard and did great," said Thomas. "All told there were 139 team conferences scheduled among the six teams and our remote teachers. In addition to other individual scheduled conferences, we had more than 85 conferences involving an interpreter. We're really proud of SFT students and staff."

"Each student reflected on their first quarter and filmed a video that was presented on Zoom along with a short newsletter to know what the next semester would look like," said Hillman. "When we invite the voices of our scholars to the table, they are not only empowered, they recognize their decisions, choices and practices are truly part of their journey and success."

DISTRICT QUICK FACTS

Olathe is a beautifully diverse community. Currently, there are 92 different languages spoken by district families. English, Spanish, Amharic and Arabic are the languages most represented by our families. Meeting the needs of families throughout the year and during parent-teacher conferences takes quite a bit of work. Samanta Landa, Olathe Public Schools language management specialist, works to provide interpreter services to families.

District Quick Facts: Language Management

- Olathe Public Schools is home to over 200 interpreters, 20 of whom are full-time employees.
 Freelance interpreters work to provide language assistance for families.
- During parent-teacher conferences, nearly 140 interpreters work with families to discuss student classroom activities.
- District interpreters speak 31 different languages.
- For help with additional languages, the district uses LanguageLink, a third-party service that provides language assistance for over 280 languages via telephone.



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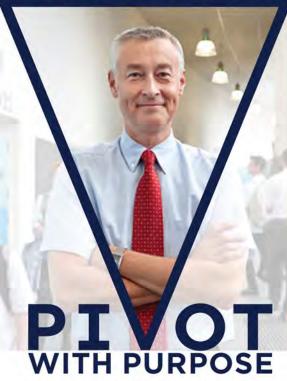
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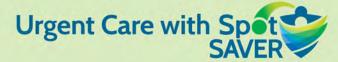
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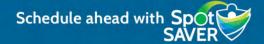


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