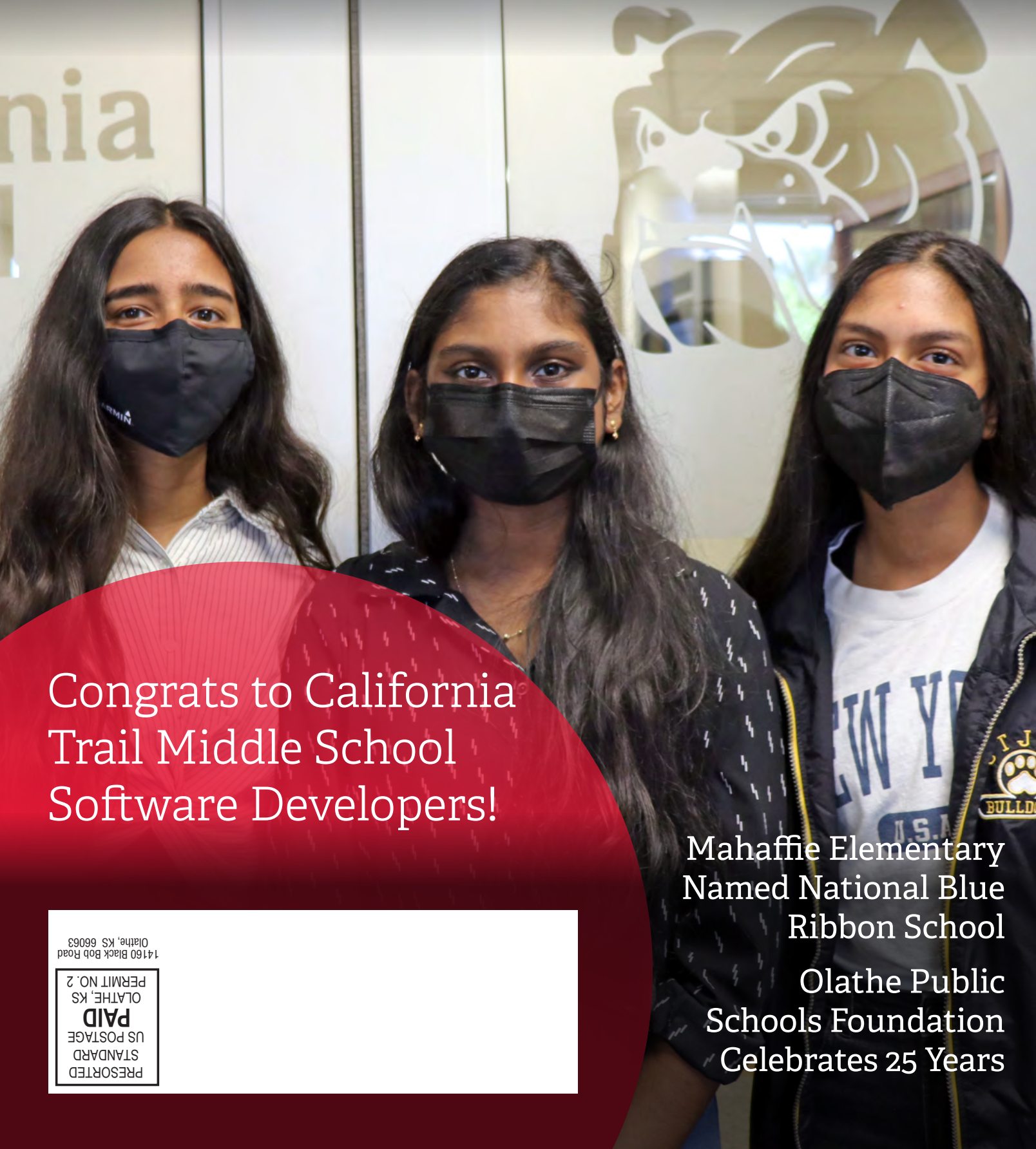




OLATHE PUBLIC SCHOOLS USD 233

School News

Winter 2021



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A Message From **SUPERINTENDENT DR. BRENT YEAGER**

One of the great privileges and joys of my job is to visit schools on a daily basis. I am able to see teachers and staff in action, visit with students and experience learning alongside them. There are incredible things happening in the Olathe Public Schools and it's been a rewarding experience to witness all of it.

This issue of School News is filled with examples of the great work of district staff and students. I cannot express enough how proud I am of the hard work, determination and creativity within our school district.

Check out the story about how physical education teachers from across the district teach students about the importance of lifelong physical activity. Read about the exciting news coming from Mahaffie Elementary, where they received the National Blue Ribbon Award.

Also in this issue is a feature story about the Olathe Public Schools Foundation, which is celebrating 25 years of supporting students and staff. What a legacy that organization has in our district.

As we end this semester and the calendar year, I want to thank you for all your support of the Olathe Public Schools. We have a top-notch school system with amazing community support, and I am grateful to each and every one of you.

Dr. Brent Yeager,
Superintendent

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PE Teachers Prepare Every Student for *Their* Future

Many students, when asked what their favorite class is, will mention Physical Education (PE). After a few moments in one of Olathe Public Schools' gymnasiums, it's easy to see why. In Olathe Public Schools, PE classes are met with anticipation and excitement due to their focus on the whole student. Districtwide, PE teachers are reimagining physical education and are turning to other subjects and skills to create an inclusive, collaborative and, most importantly, fun environment for today's learners.

Matt Pence, Frontier Trail Middle School PE teacher, has seen this evolution firsthand from being a student to now teaching the class. He noted that while "old school PE was focused on specific exercises and developing the human body," today's PE has transitioned to a more inclusive environment for all students.

"The focus has moved from physical markers of success to a broader focus on participation and introduction to lifelong physical activities," Pence said. "I believe there is a physical activity that every young person will enjoy out there somewhere and it is my job to put as many of those activities in front of them as possible."

Becky Keely, Meadow Lane Elementary PE teacher, was recently named the 2021 Kansas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (KAHPERD) Elementary PE Teacher of the Year. She believes the skills students learn in her class go beyond the gymnasium.

"Every game we play in PE uses Olathe's Portrait of a Graduate criteria (a framework that outlines the characteristics we want our students to know and be able to do when they graduate)," Keely said. "For example, working hard at a skill that is difficult, but a student not giving up shows resilience. Learning how to win and how to lose a game will build social-emotional well-being. I think you could take each lesson we teach and find ways to relate it to how we can teach students to be well-rounded and have those soft skills to succeed after high school."

The Olathe Public Schools PE teachers are constantly looking for ways to integrate other subjects into their day-to-day activities. To engage the mind as well as the body, Chant Stuewe incorporates reading, math, science, geography, and health into his lessons. Stuewe is the PE teacher at Briarwood

Elementary School and was recently honored with the KAHPERD Wayne Osnes Honor Award, given to those who have demonstrated leadership, contribution, and service in the profession.

"We painted letters on the walls to practice spelling words and to help with letter recognition. For example, we play a game where they spell out words from running to each letter individually," Stuewe said. "My physical education program includes a broad range of learning experiences designed to help the students in their developmental years and also to provide them with the interests and abilities to maintain habits of play and fitness throughout their lives."

Normally, students have a teacher for one year. However, PE is unique in that teachers will have students for multiple years in a row. Mark Mahoney, Olathe Northwest High School PE teacher, focuses on the social-emotional health of each and every one of his students through getting to know them and cultivating bonds over time.

"PE is more than just playing games. We spend hours building relationships and focusing on emotional and mental health — not just physical health," Mahoney said. "We also incorporate nutrition on a daily basis, and we have a word of the week that focuses on building relationships and overcoming obstacles."

Another social-emotional element that is practiced in PE is the art of sportsmanship. Chelsea Webb, Havencroft Elementary PE teacher, puts a heavy emphasis on sportsmanship in her classroom.

"I have started a monthly sportsmanship spotlight winner and each month I pick a new student, one from each grade. I think the coolest thing has been seeing their reactions when they see who the winners are," Webb said. "They start cheering and clapping. Nobody is upset or mad if it's not them. They genuinely are happy for each other and that's what it's all about and exactly what I am wanting them to learn."

From the collaboration with other subjects to the relationships built, there is something that will prepare every student for their future.



Mahaffie Elementary Named National Blue Ribbon School

Mahaffie Elementary School has been selected as a 2021 National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. Mahaffie Elementary is one of 325 schools nationwide and one of only five Kansas schools selected to receive this prestigious honor in 2021.

“I feel so proud of our Mahaffie community for being named a Blue Ribbon School,” said Peggy Head, Mahaffie Elementary principal. “It has been such a joy to see the gains our students have made and all the hard work of our teachers and staff. We are grateful to be part of a school district that provides the resources and opportunities needed to ensure a high-quality educational experience for our students each and every day.”

The National Blue Ribbon Schools program recognizes public and private elementary, middle and high schools based on their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. These schools demonstrate that all students can achieve high levels.

“Being a Blue Ribbon school is just so exciting,” said Caitlin McGraw, fifth grade teacher. “It means we are doing the job we are supposed to be doing. I think what makes us stand out is our leadership and how we encourage everyone to be a leader. Teachers, staff, parents, and students — everyone is just as responsible for student learning.”

The Mahaffie Elementary Knights enjoyed a weeklong celebration to commend the staff, students, and community for earning this accolade. Head, decked out in a blue wig and sitting in a yellow convertible, led a parade through the neighborhood that supported them throughout the process.

Students held signs that said, “We all had a HAND in making Mahaffie Elementary a Blue Ribbon School,” complete with construction paper hands. Each classroom was given balloons, noisemakers, and encouraged to dress in Mahaffie red. Parents

and neighbors lined the streets and applauded as the 420 students passed by. At the end of the parade, after a few school cheers, the balloons were released with a hurrah celebrating their success together.

“I do believe that a huge part of why Mahaffie is successful is because we don’t do our job solo,” said Heather Lowe, fifth grade teacher. “We come together to help our kids and ourselves be the best we can be.”

Throughout the week, students and staff enjoyed a spirit week culminating in a “Dress-Up Day” for their schoolwide assembly. Each grade level shared a poem, an original song, cheer, or word of encouragement for their fellow students. Head invited many special guests including Dr. Brent Yeager, superintendent, who spoke of his excitement and pride in the excellence at Mahaffie Elementary School.

“We are thrilled to celebrate Mahaffie Elementary School’s designation as a National Blue Ribbon School,” Yeager said. “This is a tremendous acknowledgement of the incredible work of our Mahaffie students, staff and community, and is one of the highest honors our schools can achieve. Mahaffie joins a prestigious group of schools across the nation and in our district who serve as an inspiration and a model for schools striving for excellence.”

Olathe Public Schools has earned 18 Blue Ribbon School awards. Head served as principal at Central Elementary School when it was given the National Blue Ribbon award in 1996. Now in its 39th year, the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program has bestowed almost 10,000 awards to more than 9,000 schools, with some schools winning multiple awards. The Department formally recognized all Blue Ribbon schools at an awards ceremony on Nov. 4 and 5, 2021, in Washington D.C.

Middle School Trio Earns National Recognition for Software

Three California Trail Middle School eighth graders decided to try a new skill and ended up earning national recognition for their software project about vehicle theft deterrence named K.Y.V.S (Keep Your Vehicle Safe).

Ayanna Jain, Devamayi Nair, and Vaishnavi Lakshman were awarded an Honorable Mention and named one of 40 national finalists out of 1,000 submissions in the 2021 ProjectCSGIRLS National Competition for Middle School Girls in the “Safer World” category. Founded in 2013, ProjectCSGIRLS is an organization dedicated to closing the gender gap in computing and technology.

“It’s important to try new things,” Jain said. “We were interested in computer science, and I just started browsing for opportunities and thought this sounded cool. I called up two of my friends and we started brainstorming immediately.”

The K.Y.V.S. software informs a car owner before a thief breaks into a car by using a camera and smartphone technology. The small device is installed in the vehicle and sends a notification to the owner’s phone through a wireless internet network whenever motion is detected around the vehicle, including a photo of the motion and date/time timestamp. For this software to work, Jain, Nair, and Lakshman learned Python, a coding language, and how to build a device using a Raspberry Pi computer.

Jain’s mother, Yukti Jain, served as their coach for the competition. She was thrilled that her daughter and their friends took the initiative to try something new like coding.

“Knowing how much time and hard work that they put in, I was proud of their initiative to learn something new that they could use the rest of their life — especially in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) field,” Yukti said. “I want all girls, not just my daughter and her friends, to know that they can do whatever they want for their career.”

During the process, the eighth graders approached obstacles, such as learning a new coding language, excitedly and with a plan.



“This was such a fun process, even though it was a difficult project,” Nair said. “The obstacles were even kind of fun because we loved being able to recognize the problems and overcome the obstacles to find solutions together. Even without national recognition, we would’ve felt accomplished and proud of ourselves.”

Mike Wiley, California Trail Middle School principal, was impressed with these students’ grit.

“Not only are these students clearly very smart, but they obviously care about their community enough to do something about it,” Wiley said. “Their mindset to learn new things and drive to apply them will make the world better as they move on from California Trail.”

Jain, Nair, and Lakshman want to encourage their fellow Olathe Public Schools students to look around their school for opportunities to try something new. One of the district’s goals is that every student will be challenged and supported through tiers of instruction by all staff to achieve a high standard of academic performance and growth. This nationally recognized trio agreed that their favorite thing about the district is the teachers and the support they feel to challenge themselves and try new things at school each and every day.

“There are so many opportunities here. It may sound silly, but it feels like a big family. Every teacher does more than just teaching,” Lakshman said. “They truly enjoy what they are doing and help provide so many opportunities for students. You can talk to any teacher, and they will help you.”

Keeping Kids Safe in the Olathe Public Schools

From the moment you walk through the door of an Olathe school, you can see the care that goes into keeping schools safe and secure. Each building in the district has a Raptor Visitor Management System, which allows staff to run a visitor's driver's license or government-issued ID into the Raptor system and check against the national database of registered sex offenders. The goal of Raptor is to enhance the safety and security of both students and staff by prohibiting school access to those who pose a potential threat.

In addition to this important tool, district schools are designed with a camera and buzzer system, and a series of doors to allow those who come into the building to state their business before entering the facility. Schools also use a camera system to keep properties secure and a districtwide radio system to keep in constant communication. The district also has a partnership with the Olathe Police Department to provide School Resource Officers (SROs) in all high schools and middle schools in the district.

On the technology side, the district follows the national Children's Internet Protection Act and has a Board of Education approved safety plan to comply with this important act. Some of the measures in place include:

- Blocks and internet filters on the district's network to limit access by both minors and adults to materials that are obscene, inappropriate, or harmful to minors.
- Supervision of students' online activities while utilizing the district's network, computers, or district email systems.

- Education programs for students to learn about appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking websites and in chat rooms as well as on cyberbullying awareness and response.

From a staffing perspective, there are a variety of measures in place to hire and train employees to make sure we have the best staff in place to keep students safe. This includes intensive training about mandatory reporting, bullying prevention, ethics, and much more. Additionally, Board of Education policy includes a variety of staff and student policies related to safety and security. Olathe has a thorough staff selection process. The process includes the review of all applicant materials, the conduction of interviews, and district staff thoroughly vet applicants by checking references from their current and former supervisors. Staff also conduct a criminal background check, which includes the sex offender registration, on all new hires prior to them starting in the district. Additionally, staff have concluded an extensive review of all personnel records and they are documented electronically.

The district has a mobile app, which includes a tip-line for students, staff or families to report safety and security concerns. The district mobile app can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.

The district is constantly reviewing its policies and procedures to make sure we are meeting the needs of our students and keeping them safe and secure so they can learn and grow.

Olathe Public Schools Looking for Business Opportunities for Students

The Olathe Public Schools is seeking business partners to provide student learning opportunities. Students involved in the Career Pathways, which include 21st Century Academies, Career and Technical Education, fine and performing arts, and Olathe Advanced Technical Center, need workplace experiences to further their educational goals. Workplace experiences for students can be a job shadowing opportunity, a paid or unpaid internship or client-connected project assistant. Businesses can also get involved by serving as a guest speaker in the classroom or by speaking at a career fair.

Businesses interested in becoming a partner should fill out this interest form: <https://trns.io/RTAsKI>.

Businesses interested in offering a work-based learning experience, such as a job shadow or internship should fill out this form: <https://trns.io/mwleHB>.

Career Pathways provides middle school and high school students with the knowledge and skills they need to be prepared for successful careers. Students enrolled in Career Pathways

programs progress along a pathway of specific academic and technical courses. Programs of study are organized by career clusters, which include distinct groupings of occupations and industries based on required knowledge and skills. Leadership and interpersonal skill development are enhanced through career technical student organizations like DECA, FCCLA, TSA, SkillsUSA, and more. Students often have the opportunity to participate in internships, engage with employers, apply what they learn through hands-on projects, and earn college credit.

Olathe Public Schools offers 22 Career Pathway options for student success in today's highly skilled workforce. With one of the widest expanses of programs in the state, high school students can choose from high-demand opportunities such as healthcare, manufacturing, engineering technology, human services, marketing, interior design, criminal justice, culinary and event management, and more.

We greatly appreciate all our business partners and the amazing learning opportunities they provide for our students.



Olathe Public Schools Foundation Celebrates 25 Years of Meeting the Needs of Students and Staff

Kathy Brogden, founding member of the Olathe Public Schools Foundation (OPSF), was quoted in the Olathe Star on June 12, 1996, saying, “That’s why we’re starting now, not for next year’s students, but for kids five, 10 and 20 years down the road. The future is now.” Twenty-five years later, the OPSF is doing exactly what the founders intended to do and beyond.

Cindy VonFeldt, OPSF executive director, thinks back to that quote often. The future that Brogden was talking about is now. In 1996, the first deposit in the account was \$500 but in the past three years alone, VonFeldt and her team have raised \$3 million to be invested back in the classroom.

“Here we are, 25 years down the road, and because this community has consistently shown they’ve cared for the Olathe Public Schools for the past two decades, we are able to really help our kids and our educators,” VonFeldt said. “The impact is huge. We are doing so many important things throughout the district, and it is all due to our generous donors’ continued support of a vision that has now become a reality.”

Two of their original goals were to fund grants for innovative

classroom instruction and to fund student scholarships. In the past two decades, the foundation has begun providing for student needs and partnering with community organizations to further support the Olathe Public Schools’ mission of Preparing Students for *Their* Future.

Student Scholarships

In cooperation with private donors, the OPSF offers 42 scholarships for students to utilize for their post-secondary education. Each scholarship fund has specific eligibility criteria that were defined by the donor when the fund was established. For example, R.R. Osborne was OPSF’s first planned gift donor – bequeathing a gift of \$500,000 to establish a scholarship for graduating seniors pursuing a degree in medicine, education, or business.

Molly Kurtz, a 2006 Olathe North High School alumna, received the R.R. Osborne Scholarship, which contributed \$5,000 toward her undergraduate degree in Exercise Science at the University of Kansas. After completing her master’s degree, Kurtz went on to become a physician assistant, made possible

in part because of the scholarship she was awarded through OPSF.

“A donation, no matter how big or small, is able to provide a student the opportunity to go to the next level and accomplish their goal. My goal was to work in the field of medicine and now I am in a career where I get to come back and serve the community that raised me,” Kurtz added. “We moved back to this area after attending school because we wanted our children to experience the same supportive education we received at Olathe Public Schools.”

Innovative Classroom Grants

To celebrate their 25th anniversary, the OPSF will be awarding \$125,000 in educator grants with a focus on innovation or student need, true impact, educational outcomes, and student success. Certified educators can apply for classroom grants, the Susan Spears Memorial Kindergarten Grant, or through the Women’s Giving Circle.

L.B. Fogt, Medical Professions facilitator, has been with the district for 14 years. In her time at Olathe North High School, she has been awarded several grants that have provided new experiences for students to learn and become confident in what they want to do post-secondary. During her time teaching Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), an academic support program designed to prepare students for college eligibility and success, she wanted to teach etiquette and soft skills in a unique way by hosting a formal dinner. What started as a spaghetti dinner turned into a five-course meal that influential leaders in the Olathe community attended to give students real-world experience, all due to OPSF donors. Years later, in conjunction with the Sports Medicine pathway and because of the foundation, Fogt was able to show her students an “Anatomege” table, which is a 3D anatomy rendering hardware typically reserved for medical students. In both situations, Fogt has been floored at the support from the OPSF and its donors.

“If they know it’s going to benefit students and support teachers, they will find a way to get the right resources and the right people partnered up to make our dreams come true,” Fogt said. “All of my AVID kids told me they felt confident that they understood how to interact in a networking situation, while my Medical Professions kids are able to work with industry-leading equipment they may not see until medical school, that will help them make the decision if they want to pursue this field.”

Student Need-Based Funds

The OPSF’s slogan is “Meeting the Need,” and the need has never been greater. VonFeldt and her team have furthered the conversation around equity by “providing students with what *they* need to be successful, instead of giving all students the same things.” The OPSF started with providing students in need with a backpack full of school supplies and supporting the Student Health Emergency Fund, which assists with the funding for needs like an inhaler, hearing aids, or a physical exam. But as the contributions have grown, the OPSF has been able to do more than they ever imagined.

“The stories are so hard to hear. It’s hard to hear what our kids are going through — what their families are going through,” VonFeldt said. “But the bottom line is we want them to feel supported and have what they need to be in school and be ready to learn.”

Mitch Cloud, Fairview Elementary School counselor, believes that all students learn better when they feel safe and connected to the people they are learning from, whether that is from their families or teachers. Cloud has called on the OPSF to assist with needs for families that would “inhibit a student from being able to listen and learn well,” such as displaced housing, utility bills, or an impounded car.

“The OPSF helps us bridge the gap right away so that we can work on getting to a longer-term solution that will make sure the whole child feels more confident and ready to learn,” Cloud said. “This is key in helping our parents feel more secure and less anxious, which in turn, translates to their kids. We want to ensure we are doing all we can to help the student be successful.”

Community Partnerships

VonFeldt considers partnerships with businesses and organizations a pillar of the foundation’s success. Groups across the Olathe community sponsor countless events, award recognitions, specific funds, walking paths, grants, scholarships, and volunteer opportunities in the district. Mainstreet Credit Union, originally a teacher’s credit union, contributes to the Educator Excellence Award, among other events. Jean Hughes, senior vice president, said that partnering with the OPSF is the obvious choice for Mainstreet.

“When we partner with the foundation, we know that they have their finger on the pulse of what is needed for the school district so we can use our dollars and resources to directly impact,” Hughes said. “We know exactly where the funds are going, and we can clearly see it for ourselves when we come to surprise teachers with the Educator Excellence Award, just how much this support is greatly helping students and staff.”

VonFeldt and her team believe that everyone, from one individual to a large corporation, has a gift to give. Whether that is their time, skills, resources, or financial support — anyone can do their part to help the Olathe Public Schools students, staff, and families thrive.

“Yes, we’ve been around for 25 years, and we are so proud of that, but there is still work to be done,” VonFeldt said. “Momentum is on our side and that is a credit to our community, however we still need their help to continue the work we are currently doing to meet the needs of our students and staff as well as make it possible to do even bigger and greater things for our kids.”

To find out more about the Olathe Public Schools Foundation, visit www.olathepublicschoolsfoundation.org. The OPSF is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization providing grants, scholarships and recognitions for the teachers and students at the Olathe Public Schools to recognize and enhance educational excellence.

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