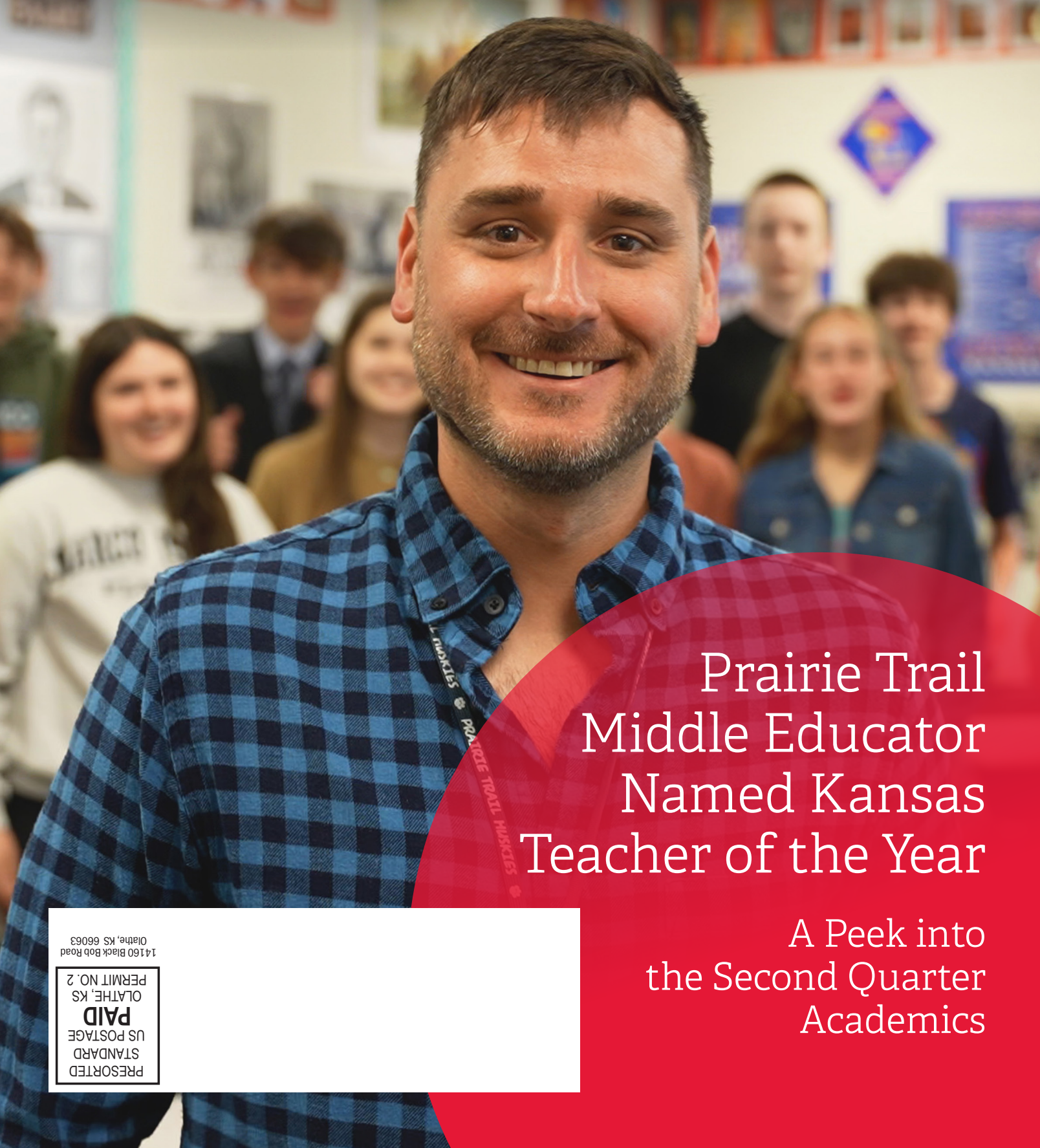




OLATHE PUBLIC SCHOOLS USD 233

# School News

Winter 2023



## Prairie Trail Middle Educator Named Kansas Teacher of the Year

A Peek into the Second Quarter Academics

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

Olathe Public Schools community,

This first semester has been full of academic achievement - both successes and challenges that have led to our students experiencing true growth. I am proud to tell you that from our first quarter's FastBridge results, we moved over 2,400 students in grades 2-9 in reading and over 1,800 students in grades 2-9 in math out of academic risk categories. At OPS, we are committed to the individual success of each of our students.

In this issue of School News, we are thrilled to share that Prairie Trail Middle School teacher Taylor Bussinger was named the Kansas Teacher of the Year by the Kansas State Department of Education. WOW! Read more about him and this award on page 4. You will also have an opportunity to read more about two events — District Site Council on page 6 and the inaugural Celebration of Hispanic Excellence on page 7. These are two events where our community really shines! Finally, get a peek on what second quarter academics look like districtwide on page 8.

We want to take a moment to thank you for your partnership with all of our staff as we have walked through this school year moving #OPSTogether. Our staff members are always grateful for our dedicated family and community engagement — in fact, it is one of the main reasons Olathe Public Schools is such a great place to be.

Your very proud superintendent,

**Dr. Brent Yeager**  
*Superintendent*

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### Olathe Public Schools

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# Prairie Trail Middle Educator Named Kansas Teacher of the Year

Out of nearly 40,000 teachers in the state of Kansas, Prairie Trail Middle School eighth-grade social studies teacher Taylor Bussinger was named the 2024 Kansas Teacher of the Year during the Dale Dennis Kansas Teacher of the Year (KTOY) Banquet in Wichita on Sept. 23.

“I’m incredibly honored and humbled to have accepted the Kansas Teacher of the Year award on behalf of these educators,” Bussinger said. “I want to thank my family, friends, coworkers, the Olathe School District, my Prairie Trail school community, and most importantly the young people I’ve had the privilege to teach and learn from. My job has allowed me to figure out who I really am and for that I’m forever grateful.”

Bussinger received a Bachelor of Science degree in education with an emphasis on social studies and his master’s in curriculum and instruction from the University of Kansas. He has taught at Prairie Trail for nine years. He currently serves as the head boys’ basketball coach, head cross-country coach, a member of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and

Supports team and he is the co-founder and sponsor of the Diversity Club.

“We are so grateful to have ‘Mr. Buss’ on our team at PRT,”

Prairie Trail principal Dr. Jenna Jones said. “He is so deserving of this award. He works tirelessly every day to make a lasting impact on his students’ lives through positive relationships, engaging instruction and making sure all their voices are heard.”

Bussinger was one of 124 educators across the state nominated for the prestigious award, with eight finalists being chosen at the state level. Throughout the coming year, the KTOY finalists will work as a team to advocate for education and teaching.

“I was inspired to learn alongside such dedicated and passionate educators from across our state,” Bussinger said. “From the many district nominees to the eight finalists representing our state, these individuals are rock stars! I’m eager

to work with the 2024 KTOY team as the eight of us seek to advocate for our amazing Kansas teachers and young people.”



I speak for all his former students when I say that he is one of the most life-changing teachers I have had the honor of learning from.

**Ellie Wilson**  
Olathe Public Schools graduate





As Kansas Commissioner of Education Dr. Randy Watson and the 2023 KTOY winner Brian Skinner announced this year's winner, Bussinger was shocked to hear his name called. Several Olathe Public Schools administrators and educators were present at the banquet and led a standing ovation as he made his way to the stage.

"True education is authentic," Bussinger said in his acceptance speech. "It's messy. It's real. It's full of energy. It's full of laughter. It's full of tears, and it's full of vibrant passion in which young people are inspired to be curious enough to know who they truly are in the context of an ever-changing world. And young people's voices should be included in the narrative of what school should be. After all, it's their future we are preparing them for."

Ellie Wilson, a graduate of Olathe Public Schools and former student of Bussinger, wrote a letter of recommendation for him as part of the KTOY nomination process.

"Not only did this teacher challenge everything I thought I believed, but he also showed me how to see things from a different point of view. All while sponsoring somewhat civil debates between 20 13-year-olds," Wilson wrote in her letter. "This class helped me to actualize my dreams by revealing to me my passion for politics and history. I speak for all his former students when I say that he is one of the most life-changing teachers I have had the honor of learning from."

The Teacher of the Year program has state and national competitions. The Kansas program is sponsored by the Kansas State Department of Education. The national program, presented by Voya Financial, is a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers. Bussinger is now a candidate for National Teacher of the Year.

"Congratulations to Taylor Bussinger, or 'Mr. Buss' as his colleagues and students call him," Superintendent Dr. Brent Yeager said. "He represents everything we want in a teacher and role model for our students. He teaches his academic content with excellence to ensure his students succeed, while also taking the time to care for his students' wellbeing so they feel valued and heard in his classroom. Taylor, we are all so proud of you here in Olathe Public Schools! Thank you for your commitment to preparing all students for their future."







## Olathe Public Schools Hosts District Site Council

In September, the Olathe Public Schools community was invited to Olathe South High School for District Site Council. The meeting provides an opportunity for attendees to learn how various departments and programs help us achieve our vision of students prepared for their future. The theme of the evening was “See the Success in OPS!”

“The Olathe Public Schools fall site council was an incredible opportunity to highlight the things that are going on across our system,” Olathe Public Schools Chief Academic Officer Dr. Tim Reves said. “We experience successes in our district every day, many of which go unnoticed as part of the daily experience.”

The night kicked off with a message from Superintendent Dr. Brent Yeager as well as a performance from the districtwide cast of “Frozen the Musical” by over a hundred students.

“We are so glad our families, staff and community members made time to come to district site council this week,” Dr. Yeager said. “One of our big focuses this year is community engagement and it was so encouraging to look around and see the attendees celebrate our district’s commitment to success.”

The three big focuses for Olathe Public Schools this academic year are community engagement, academic achievement and student inclusivity. The goal of the site council is to show the public how the district is taking action to improve in these areas and remain at a high standard.

“Nothing happens by chance,” Dr. Reves said. “We have amazing staff who are intentional about their work to ensure a positive experience for students and families. It was our goal to highlight the work we are doing so our community could experience the behind-the-scenes work that makes this such a great district.”

Over 100 attendees attended a variety of sessions including successful parent-teacher conferences, becoming multilingual, special education, title schools, curriculum processes, community development, hiring our own, culture and belonging, teacher retention, student technology, positive behavior interventions and supports, multi-tiered system of supports, behavior and social-emotional learning and assessments. These 14 sessions gave attendees the opportunity to learn more about what the district is doing to prepare students for their future.

“I am proud of the work we do, and this event truly showcases how our district works to prepare students for their individual future,” Dr. Yeager said. “We are more committed than ever to meeting the high expectations we’ve set for our district at every level. That includes keeping academics at the forefront, making sure we keep our community engaged in our schools and ensuring our students and staff feel like they belong.”





# Celebration of Hispanic Excellence Hosted During Hispanic Heritage Month

In October, the Olathe Public Schools' community came together for a night of food, music and awards at the inaugural Celebration of Hispanic Excellence. Hosted and put together by the Department of Culture and Belonging, the event celebrated our Hispanic students, teachers and community, while also highlighting the beauty of our diverse cultures.

"Thank you to the incredible group of students and staff that helped create our first Celebration of Hispanic Excellence," Director of Culture and Belonging Kathleen Smith said. "Your work and dedication produced a beautiful night and a strong imprint of excellence in our community!"

The evening began with some inspiring words to the community from Superintendent Dr. Brent Yeager. Afterwards, the audience was treated to a special mariachi performance from Eli Lugo, a high school student from the Kansas City area. The celebration was hosted by Santa Fe Trail Middle School Spanish teacher Anna Smith-Garcia, who also serves as the Latino Educator Affinity Group leader, and the Latina Leadership Club vice president, senior Rubi Reza.

"Through this celebration we hope to inspire the future generation to keep working hard no matter which culture you're from or what language you speak," Smith-Garcia said. "But most importantly students, teachers and the community need to know that Olathe Public Schools acknowledges who they are and the work they do."

Hispanic students, staff, and members from the community were honored with various awards throughout the evening. To start, Hispanic Academic Excellence awards were given to one elementary, one middle school and one high school student. The honorees were fifth grader Juan Quiceno Calvo from Countryside Elementary School, eighth grader Sara Santacruz from Frontier Trail Middle School and senior Meredith Serrano from Olathe East High School. Other awards given out during

the ceremony included the Community Organization Award and the School and Community Partner Award. Linda Barrandey, language management specialist for Olathe Public Schools and the winner of the Classified Staff Award, said it was truly a night to remember.

"It has always been a pleasure to be part of a community that has taught me so much. I am proud to be a part of the education team for students and families and to help make a difference in our community," Barrandey said. "Celebrating with the students was very emotional. At the end of the day, they are the reason why we are here and there is nothing better than sharing this celebration with them."

The Student Club Award was given to two clubs that have provided an incredible impact in the Olathe and Hispanic community. The first one went to the Olathe Leadership Lowrider Bike and the second went to the Latina Leadership Club at Olathe North High School. Marta Silva, Olathe North Spanish teacher and Latina Leadership Club sponsor, felt it was "refreshing" to see students feel recognized within their own communities.

"When our work is recognized within the community, our strength is renewed and our vision of academic excellence toward a professional future is reinforced," Silva said. "These kids come from strong families who are here to support their dreams. It's our job to meet their expectations and value their backgrounds."

Hosted and put together by the Department of Culture and Belonging, the event celebrated our Hispanic students, teachers and community, while also highlighting the beauty of our diverse cultures. In fact, 19.28% of the district's student population is Hispanic/Latino.



# Academic Achievement

## A Peek into the Second Quarter

In the second quarter, daily academic growth is the norm. Classroom expectations are set, relationships have been established and students have experienced their first round of FastBridge screening assessments. These assessments point to concepts where students might need additional support. More diagnostic assessments are administered to target identified needs and the support that follows is known as an “intervention.” Intervention is a process whereby teachers work directly with students to ensure mastery of a concept or skill, and can be done in a one-on-one or small group setting. Students of all ability levels experience interventions, whether it is to revisit a certain concept or to extend their learning.

“At this point, teachers have analyzed their students’ screener results and are progress monitoring their intervention groups to ensure they are providing the best way forward for each student,” Director of School Improvement and Assessments Dr. Julie Veatch said. “For example, if a student’s screener shows they are struggling with subtraction, there will be an intervention put in place so that they are receiving more instruction around this concept.”

School interventions are built into the regular school day and are primarily short-term focused. Once the child has made progress, the intervention will change, as they may no longer need it.

“I am very proud of the work our students and staff have done,” Chief Academic Officer Dr. Tim Reves said. “After our previous 18 months of work around multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and putting interventions in place for all students, we are starting to see upward

growth districtwide for the first time since the pandemic. Our staff has worked tirelessly to continue to progress monitor students to ensure mastery of standards.”

According to our beginning of the year screeners, all 10 of our middle schools experienced growth in grades 6-8 in both reading and math. Shelly Todd, a MTSS literacy specialist who works at the secondary level, believes this is directly connected to quality tier one instruction and the intervention work.

“None of this success is possible without the incredible dedication of teachers who are leading the interventions,” Todd said. “They have worked hard to build knowledge, analyze data, and problem solve for student instruction. Our district is on the forefront of this initiative equipping teachers with the knowledge to provide effective, systematic math and literacy interventions. And it isn’t just literacy and math teachers who are teaching interventions. There are band, social studies, science, and ELL teachers — to name a few — who are interventionists because they see students’ academic success as everyone’s responsibility.”

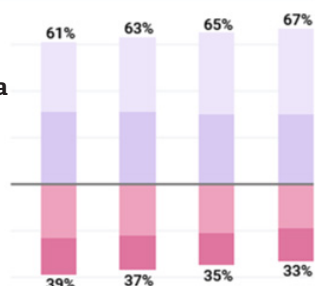
During the second quarter, students are learning every single day because their teachers are individualizing instruction and making data-driven decisions.

This is not, and it never should be, a guessing game,” Dr. Veatch said. “When we know what a student needs to revisit a skill or even take it to the next level, we will provide that for them. To see a student master a concept — that lightbulb moment — this is why we as educators do what we do.”

### Academic Success

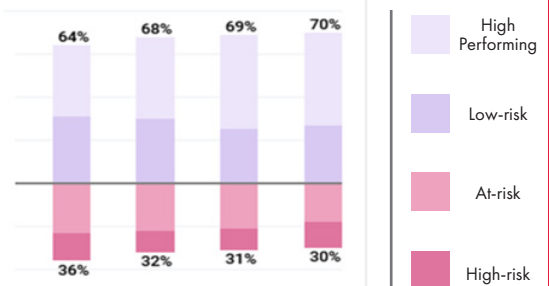
#### District Reading Data

We moved 2,400+ students out of risk categories



#### District Math Data

We moved 1,800+ students out of risk categories.







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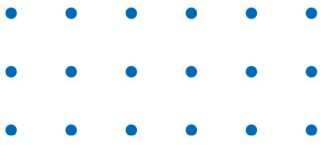
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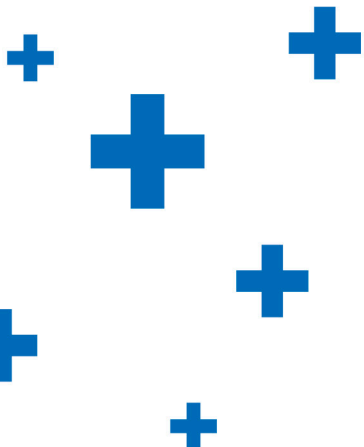


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