



Olathe
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

School News

Winter 2024



Meet Our National Merit Semifinalists

Chronic Absenteeism

Top Stories from
Around the District

*One semifinalist not pictured due to prior commitment.

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

Olathe Public Schools Community,

What a wonderful first semester we have had in Olathe Public Schools, and it's not quite over. In this issue of School News, we are thrilled to share with you the 12 seniors who were named National Merit Scholar Semifinalists. This is such an amazing accomplishment for our students, and we can't wait for you to meet them on page 8. Next, you will read about our fall district site council meeting that honed in on the topic of chronic absenteeism that is impacting our school district. This is a team effort with our families, students, staff and community, so make sure to learn more about this important topic. You will also read about some fun elementary and middle school highlights over the past couple of months on page 6. Finally, we have an update on our 2022 Bond projects, as well as a way for families with children ages 0-5 who reside within our district boundaries to get involved early!

As the second semester closes, we want to thank our community for their support every single day as we continue to focus on our common goal of building the best future we can through our young people and their learning. All of us at Olathe Public Schools send you our best wishes and hope you have a fun-filled, peaceful and wonderful holiday season.

Your very proud superintendent,

Dr. Brent Yeager
Superintendent

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Olathe Public Schools

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Chronic Absenteeism

A Community Call to Action

"District Site Councils are an opportunity for the district to showcase how we are intentional about partnering with our parents and staff for the success of students and ultimately our community," Chief Academic Officer Dr. Tim Reves said. This fall, administrators, community members, and families addressed the critical issue of chronic absenteeism.

Some primary causes of missing school include barriers, aversion, disengagement, and misconceptions. Dr. Scott Fluke, assistant director of Behavior and Social Emotional Learning (BSEL) and Mental Health Services, shared, "Students miss school for many reasons. Understanding why

is essential, as it enables schools and families to collaborate to support the student effectively." By focusing on these root causes, we can take meaningful steps to improve student attendance and overall school experience.

After the opening session, attendees chose two breakout sessions from a diverse range of 13 options, each encouraging attendees to collaborate in areas where they're most passionate. Topics included mental health, community partnerships, building a supportive school culture, creating welcoming schools, strength-based approaches, engaging Hispanic families, early childhood and kindergarten readiness,



maximizing middle school potential, a high school focus, community engagement, student wellness, and Title 1 schools parent meetings.

The information gathered was compiled and analyzed for common themes. Reves shared that the “assistant superintendents will collaborate with building principals at their level with the intent of helping buildings better understand the possible barriers as well as potential solutions.” By incorporating diverse perspectives from our families, educators, and community members, the district can better identify effective strategies, refine current initiatives, and implement actionable solutions tailored to meet the unique needs of our students and schools. We are already seeing improvements in absenteeism and look forward to continuing to partner with parents and families to ensure that student attendance is a priority.



FACTS

ABOUT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM



Chronic absenteeism is when a student **misses 10% or more** of the school year's instructional days for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences. Missing just two days a month or 18 days total means a child misses 10% of school.

Chronic absenteeism can have a **negative impact** on a student's academic achievement, including difficulty learning to read by third grade, achieving in middle school, and graduating from high school.



There are several reasons a student may be chronically absent including **barriers** such as chronic illness or housing instability; **aversion** to school due to academic or social struggles; **disengagement** from increased family vacation time or no meaningful relationships at school.

Olathe Public Schools is committed to finding solutions and addressing chronic absenteeism head on.



HOOP
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TWO YEARS
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SIZE
5

Around the District

Recess Equipment Donated by Generous Community Partners

Huston Contracting Inc. teamed up with community organizations to bring brand new recess equipment to all 36 of our elementary schools! While visiting elementary schools during the playground upgrade, Vice President Doug R. Huston noticed that "the recess equipment had been cared for and loved on by a lot of kids." This meant that many of the sports balls were worn out and no longer in top shape. Wanting to make a difference, Huston partnered with local businesses to provide each school with new basketballs, soccer balls, footballs, and kickballs. The students' excitement at each delivery was undeniable as they received the fresh equipment for their recess games.



Cyclone Closet

Santa Fe Trail Middle School's Cyclone Closet allows students and families access to hygiene products, clothing, and a washer and dryer. "Just because you build a new building does not mean your need is going to go away," J.J. Libal, school principal, said. "Your need is still there." All items in the Cyclone Closet are available for students and families at no cost. The closet has an outside entrance that allows it to be open on the weekend in addition to during school hours and evening events. If you would like to make a donation, please drop items off in the Santa Fe Trail front office (1100 N. Ridgeview Rd., Olathe, KS 66061).

Eighth Grade Career Pathways Fair

Eighth grade students had the exciting opportunity to explore the wide variety of career pathways awaiting them in high school! From Career and Technical Education Pathways and Academies, Olathe Advanced Technical Center programs, and visual and performing arts, students discovered many options to pursue their passions. They heard firsthand from current high school students involved in these programs and teacher representatives to learn what each entails.



National Merit



Wesley Janssen is a senior at Olathe East High School. He is interested in science, engineering, and music, particularly the clarinet. He is involved in various school activities, including the marching band, basketball band, and Tri-M Honor Society. Janssen values the social connections made through music and prefers challenging classes for intellectual growth. He fondly recalls band trips to Los Angeles and New York. Post-graduation, he plans to study engineering, with a preference for physical sciences. He has enjoyed being part of the gifted program as it has influenced his academic success. His advice to younger students would be to get involved!



Cody Schwindt is a senior at Olathe South High School and is part of the Computer Science Academy. He is currently interning at CommunityAmerica Credit Union as an IT intern, handling tasks like laptop repairs and hardware deliveries. Schwindt enjoys programming projects and melting metals as a hobby. He values the social aspect of school and being involved in activities like Scholars Bowl and tutoring. Schwindt plans to attend college for four years, likely majoring in computer engineering, and aspires to become a software or computer engineer. His experience in the QUEST program has provided personalized academic support. His advice to younger students is to take challenging classes because even though they are a lot of work, it's worth it! He has appreciated the opportunity to gain college credit while still in high school.



Ethan Wolf is a senior at Olathe West High School who is passionate about engineering. He is actively involved in the Technology Student Association (TSA), which he finds both fun and educational. Wolf values community involvement and enjoys high school for its social aspects and opportunities to explore interests. His favorite school memory is competing in TSA nationals in Dallas. After graduation, he plans to study engineering, possibly with a double major in filmmaking. He aspires to be an aerospace engineer, emphasizing the importance of creativity in engineering. Wolf is involved in Green Tech Academy, where he has had the opportunity to meet other like-minded students. The Green Tech Academy is focused on sustainability and clean energy practices. He encourages younger students to take harder classes to challenge themselves and to find opportunities to be involved. His sister, who overcame epilepsy and learning disabilities, serves as his biggest inspiration.



Aidric Smith is a senior at Olathe West High School involved in National Honor Society, Scholars Bowl, orchestra, and French Club. He plays the viola and values being involved in activities for personal growth and networking. His favorite school memory is a trip to Chicago with the orchestra. Smith plans to attend Oklahoma State University to study physiology, cellular biology, or microbiology, with a minor in neuroscience and possibly psychology. He aspires to make a difference in the world through brain research. He values Olathe Public Schools' inclusivity and has always felt a strong support system at school. He encourages younger students to build diverse social networks.

Semifinalists



Ava Evans, a senior at Olathe Northwest High School, is passionate about art and creativity. Ava has been playing the violin since the second grade, and it has been a highlight of her career in Olathe Public Schools. As a member of Scholars Bowl and a new participant in Science Olympiad, she values the connections and support she finds through school activities. Reflecting on her school experience, she says she loves attending school because “there’s no other place where you’re able to learn from so many people who specialize” in their field. Ava plans to attend the University of Nebraska Lincoln, majoring in Emerging Media Arts with a focus on Game Design and 3D modeling, aspiring to a career in game design or entertainment media.



Alexander Pannier, a senior at Olathe Northwest High School, is driven by his ambition to become a chemical engineer. Through the district’s Engineering Academy, he has gained hands-on experience with engineering concepts and projects that provide valuable, industry-focused skills each year. Alexander appreciates the Academy’s technical emphasis, which has sharpened his vision for a future in engineering. With plans to study chemical engineering at the University of Kansas, Alexander appreciates how the school environment has helped him build meaningful connections and encouraged him to open up to new friendships.



Connor Chaffin is a senior at Olathe Northwest High School. He is the Student Council president and actively participates in debate, forensics, Scholar Bowl, Technology Student Association, class council, and environmental club. Connor believes “active involvement is the best way to make the most of school.” He values these experiences for developing critical thinking and public speaking skills. After graduation, he plans to study political science and economics, with his dream job being a prosecutor or a judge. He shared he is grateful for his journey and opportunities in Olathe Public Schools.



Eston Garcia, a senior at Olathe Northwest High School and a National Merit semifinalist, is involved in the First Robotics Team, Scholars Bowl, and marching band. He highlights the importance of extracurricular activities as an outlet during tough times and for the social interaction they provide. His favorite school memories include placing third at State with the band and fifth at Scholars Bowl. Post-graduation, he aims to attend Liberty University, majoring in civil engineering. Reflecting on his experience in the Engineering Academy, he appreciates how it combines math and science, giving him valuable insight into his future career.

National Merit Semifinalists *continued*



Elijah Tamano, a senior at Olathe Northwest High School, was taken by surprise and is honored to be a National Merit Semifinalist. As concertmaster of the ONW's orchestra, Elijah values his involvement in school programs, believing they strengthen communication skills essential for future success. With plans to study Civil Engineering with a focus on urban planning, he aims to support community development through innovative infrastructure. Elijah is grateful for "each individual teacher" who helped him grow from a reserved elementary student into a confident leader.



Micah Augustine, an Olathe Northwest High School senior and National Merit Semifinalist, is involved in the marching band and the First Robotics Team, serving as the Chief Technology Officer. He values his involvement in these activities for the fun, social connections, and skill development of his hobbies. Micah says, "I like coming to school because I get to see all my friends." This year, he's dedicating himself to math and science courses, working toward pursuing an engineering degree after graduation. His time at Olathe Northwest has helped him grow academically and equipped him with the skills and connections that will serve him well in his future endeavors.



Braden Pickard, a National Merit Semifinalist and senior at Olathe Northwest High School, values his school experience for the academics and the social environment it provides. He believes attending school is crucial for connecting with others, allowing students to find their people and build meaningful relationships. Among his favorite subjects is animal science, which has deepened his passion for the natural world and reinforced his desire to pursue a career in marine biology. Braden credits much of his positive academic experience to the inspiring teachers who have supported and motivated him throughout his high school journey. Their dedication has helped shape his academic success and fueled his aspirations for the future.



Eugenie Kim, a senior at Olathe Northwest High School, is a National Merit Semifinalist passionate about leadership and community involvement. Outside of school, she volunteers at Advent Health Hospital and started a tutoring program to help North Korean defectors' children to help them adjust to life in the United States. Eugenie values her education in Olathe Public Schools, where she feels challenged and encouraged to explore her curiosity. "I love being challenged and having my curiosity met at school," she says. With a passion for politics and community involvement, Eugenie plans to major in government, political science, and philosophy after graduation, hoping to one day become a Supreme Court judge.

Be Informed.

Approaching the Final Projects of the 2022 Bond

With the new Santa Fe Trail Middle School facility complete, the old building demolition has begun and will continue into the new year. Construction continues on both the tennis courts and tracks at several high schools and middle schools across our district, including both the Olathe District Activity Center and College Boulevard Activity Center. The middle school auditorium and high school media center projects construction will kick off in the second semester.

Finally, there has been continuous work on the Olathe Public Schools Innovation Campus, which will house the new Career and Technical Education Center and the Operations Service Center. The concrete footings and foundations are complete, and we continue utility rough-in, interior wall construction, exterior wall construction and roofing in both the existing building and the new addition. For more information, please visit www.olatheschools.org/bond2022.



Get Involved.

Parents as Teachers Programs for Families of Children Ages 0-5

If you have a child ages 0-5 years old and reside within Olathe Public Schools boundaries, you can apply to the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program. This free program is personalized to meet the needs of individual families of babies and young children through home-based or personal visits, center-based learning, group connection events including playgroups, a referral network and supporting care providers.

Our program is a part of the national PAT program and follows its curriculum. All parent educators have a minimum of an undergraduate degree and experience in early childhood education, and also train in the national PAT certification program. For more information, please visit www.olatheschools.org/PAT.

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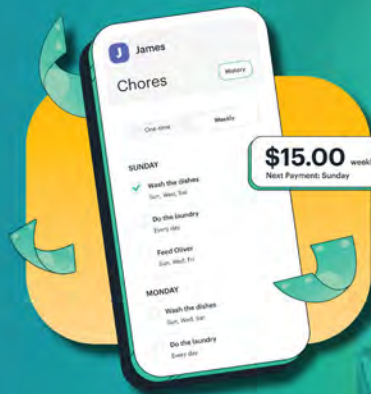
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