

School NEWS



FALL 2020



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A Message From **SUPERINTENDENT JOHN ALLISON**



We have said it repeatedly. The 2020-21 school year will be unlike any other school year any of us have experienced. Our students are learning in new and different ways and our educators and staff are adapting and adjusting to the changing and evolving situation.

However, one thing is very clear. The education of students in the Olathe Public Schools has been and will continue to be our first priority. Our educators, staff and administrators have put in months of work to make sure that no matter what learning mode our students are in, they are getting the high quality Olathe Public Schools education that our community expects and our students deserve.

In this issue of *School News*, we are pleased to share with you an important update on the work around Diversity and

Engagement in the district. We have an incredible staff in this department committed to this vital work for our system.

Also in this issue, we are highlighting some important tips for families about maximizing remote learning, wellness and communication. We have featured some outstanding students collecting school supplies and we have featured the great work of the Olathe Public Schools Foundation.

We hope you find this issue filled with important information for families. Most importantly, we hope your children are having a great start to the school year.

Thank you for your support of the Olathe Public Schools.
Sincerely,

**John Allison,
Superintendent**

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Olathe Public Schools 14160 S. Black Bob Road, Olathe, KS 66063
(913) 780-7000 • www.olatheschools.org

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OLATHE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION AN IMPORTANT RESOURCE FOR EDUCATORS, FAMILIES

Ideally, every student in Olathe would show up at school each day with a full stomach and having had a good night's sleep in a comfortable home. Students should feel a connection to their teachers and classmates throughout the day while also discovering a love of learning. The Olathe Public Schools Foundation (OPSF) is constantly striving toward providing the best environment for children to learn and grow.

Twenty-three years ago, some forward-thinking Olatheans launched the OPSF to serve as a conduit between a caring community that wanted to enhance the excellence in their schools and the teachers and students they sought to serve. The Olathe Public Schools Foundation is now the go-to resource for Olathe educators and families, alike.

For nearly a quarter century, the OPSF has focused on classroom grants and recognition of outstanding staffers. Providing need-based support has been part of their program menu for years. In 2020, it has become a major focus of their efforts.

"I'm confident that our founding board members did not envision today's pandemic," said OPSF Executive Director Cindy VonFeldt. "But they laid the groundwork for a strong organization that has or can find the resources needed to help stabilize the families of our most vulnerable students during difficult times."

With the support of the community, the OPSF has paid rent and utility bills for families with a goal of keeping students housed in a stable location. They've funded access to mental health care for students who are struggling or need immediate intervention. The OPSF made sure all students had the school supplies they need to attend school this fall, in-person or virtually. During these tough times, caring community members have made supporting the most vulnerable Olathe students a priority. Through gifts to the COVID-19 Student Assistance Fund, the Wimmer Student Care Fund, the Braden Robertson Student Mental Health Fund and the Student Health Emergency Fund, the Olathe community provides help when and where it is needed the most, at the request of our front-line workers — the teachers, counselors, and administrators in our schools.

"Giving students and their families a hand up during a crisis helps all of us," said Monica Dahl, OPSF Board of Directors. "When one of us is struggling, we all struggle. It feels good to know that through our work at the OPSF, we strengthen our classrooms, support our teachers and help all of our students remain in school, ready to learn."

To learn more about the work of the OPSF, visit their website at www.olathepublicschoolsfoundation.org.

NOTIFICATION STATEMENT OF NON-DISCRIMINATION.

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Join us for this free virtual event to learn about the AMAZING WAYS the Olathe Public Schools Foundation supports students and teachers, including:



Hundreds of students and their families were kept in their homes with rent and utility assistance.



More than 300 students in crisis received a one-on-one visit with a mental health therapist.



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\$100,000 in classroom grants supported innovative projects at all grade levels across the district.



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TIPS FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR

The beginning of the school year can be a hectic time for families. Given the 2020-21 school year is unlike any other school year, we've assembled some information for our families that will help make this school year successful.

Communication

There are several methods in which the Olathe School District communicates with our families and our community. To ensure that you are receiving the most up-to-date information, please consider the following to be an engaged partner in your student's education:

- **Update your contact information.** To ensure that you are receiving school and district news, call your school and verify the contact information on file is correct. Information to parents and guardians is likely to come in the form of text messages and emails so please keep information updated.
- **Website.** Visit the district's website (www.olatheschools.org) for information, news, calendars and more.
- **Social media.** Consider following your child's school and the district on social media. Not only will you receive news and updates, you'll find images and stories that make our school communities unique.
- **Olathe Public Schools mobile app.** Consider downloading the district's free mobile app from your mobile device's store. This mobile app provides push notifications for school and district news and resources helpful for all parents: the district calendar, staff directories, lunch menus, transportation, safety Tip Line and more. This app is a one-stop-shop for all things Olathe Public Schools.
- **See something, say something.** Keeping students and staff safe is our top priority. To help partner in the safety of students and staff, we encourage our families to establish and maintain open communications with their teachers and principals. To provide information from afar, the Tip Line on the district's mobile app allows users the opportunity to provide information or feedback. Users can remain anonymous or provide information to further a discussion. It is vital for our community to work together for safety.
- **Keep in contact.** Whether in-person or remote, keep in contact with your teachers, counselors, case workers or principal. Regardless of where you receive instruction, you are a part of your home school. You are cared for and appreciated. Please help to address issues before they become larger.

Remote Learning

This school year we have students in various learning formats. To help our remote learners maximize their potential away from classrooms, here are a few items to consider:

- **You are still a part of your home school.** Play an active role by staying in contact with teachers or the principal as you would with in-person learning. Do not hesitate to reach out for questions or clarification.
- **If possible, set up a quiet place for learners void of distraction.** To best keep student focus, limit items that can cause distractions such as toys or electronics.
- **Maintain a daily routine.** Students crave structure and boundaries.
- Work with students about the importance of self-care items such as eating properly, exercising and getting adequate amounts of rest.
- **Accept change and teach positivity.** Children will follow the lead of their parents. Allow students to make mistakes and then help them recover. Keeping a positive mindset and providing grit and resilience in front of your student will help them accept change as it may be necessary throughout the school year.
- Parents may contact the Technology and Learning Help Desk via phone at 913-780-8058 or via email to helpdesk@olatheschools.org. The Help Desk will be open from 7:30 a.m.-7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Wellness

- **Practice good hygiene and patience.** As this year will not look like any other, we encourage our families to remain positive, practice good hygiene outside of our buildings and together we'll make COVID a thing of the past.
- **Family communication.** Maintain a line of communication within your family. Talk to students about how they are feeling.
- **Resources.** Mental health resources are available for students. Please reach out to your principal in order to access these resources. It is imperative for students and their families to understand their mental health.



Department of
**DIVERSITY &
ENGAGEMENT**
Olathe Public Schools



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: **THE OLATHE PUBLIC SCHOOLS DEPARTMENT OF DIVERSITY AND ENGAGEMENT**

The Olathe Public Schools attendance area serves more than 30,000 students in Olathe, Overland Park and Lenexa. As a leader in Kansas public education, the Olathe School District is a destination district for many families in the area and even around the globe.

Currently, there are 92 different languages spoken by families in district schools. To better reflect the student demographics and serve the families, which make up a beautifully diverse community, the Department of Diversity and Engagement was established in 2019. Embedded in the department's foundation are diversity, equity and inclusion focused on supporting students, staff and community through training and connections.

"We knew, that as a district, we needed to make a commitment and what we're talking about is a cultural change," Olathe Public Schools Superintendent John Allison said. "It's not a checklist, it's not a trend, it is a cultural change which we have to be in for the long haul."

Department members Erik Erazo, Diversity and Engagement coordinator, and Marquis Harris, Diversity and Engagement facilitator, collectively have more than 23 years working to champion diversity and equity initiatives. Samanta Landa, language management specialist, oversees over 200 district and freelance translators and all message translations. Landa has been serving Olathe families since 2012.

Originally from California, Erazo enlisted in the United States Army after earning his diploma. Erazo started at Olathe North High School more than 17 years ago and was inspired to further his education. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in education.

"I really felt like I related to some of the kids. I saw kids that really needed a place to belong and I felt like I could provide that for them," Erazo said. "My educational experience was not good and I wanted theirs to be positive."

Serving on multiple community boards, Erazo received the 2013 Olathe Human Relations Educator Award, was named the Olathe Public Schools Emporia State University Master Teacher in 2017 and received the 2019 City of Olathe Cathedral Builder Award.

Harris is a first-generation college graduate and previously served students and staff members at the college level while working to launch the Wyandotte County Men of Color Leadership Conference in an effort to bridge the gap on college access for high school men from underrepresented populations. Harris has hosted numerous workshops and keynote presentations for colleges and universities,

and local and national organizations such as Toastmasters International, National College Athletic Association and the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity.

Key initiatives for the 2020-21 school year were provided to the Board of Education during its July meeting. These initiatives included initial training for administrators and certified staff members, plans for ongoing training and support and the launch of the Diversity and Engagement Advisory Council (DEAC).

The purpose of the DEAC is to advise, survey and implement a plan of action on topics of diversity, equity and inclusion within the Olathe Public Schools. The primary objective is to ensure the fidelity of all diversity initiatives throughout the district by its cornerstone measures:

- **Support the Department of Diversity and Engagement in creating an equitable environment throughout the district.**
- **Discuss concerns and opportunities for improvement in programming and practices around diversity, equity and inclusion.**
- **Make recommendations to district administration.**
- **Be champions of diversity, equity and inclusion for the district and the Olathe community.**

The DEAC will hold monthly meetings and provide support with subcommittees to help outline items such as recruitment strategies for Olathe Public Schools staff, student engagement and community relations. While this committee will have its foundation within the district, the committee will provide betterment throughout the community.

As the Olathe School District and the Department of Diversity and Engagement are making intentional steps to champion diversity, equity and inclusion for students, staff and community, support of the community strengthens district students and staff.

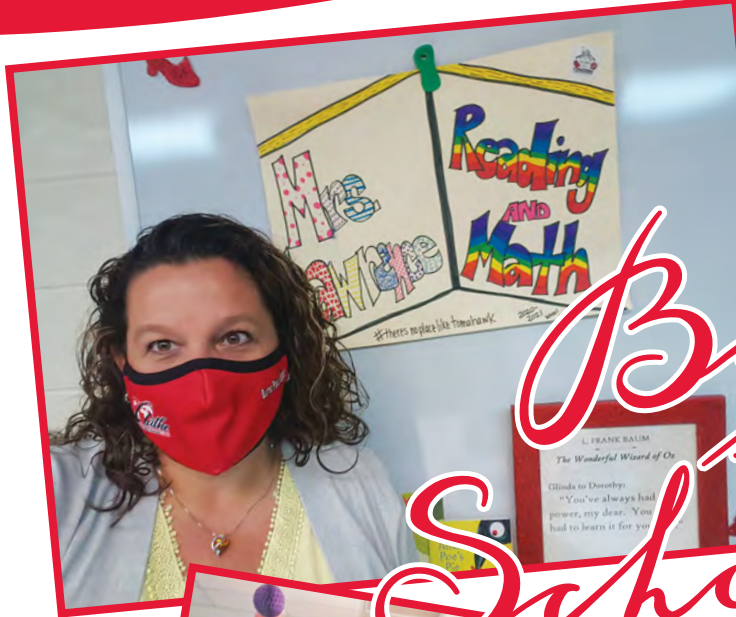
Together, as educators, administrators, families and as humans, our district will continue to listen and support our community. Our staff is committed to ensuring safety, inclusion and equity.

To receive more information about the Department of Diversity and Engagement or to get involved, visit their website at www.olatheschools.org/diversity or send an email to diversity@olatheschools.org.

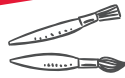


1+2=3

Back to School



1+2=3

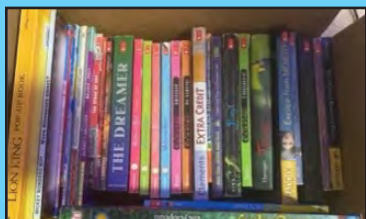
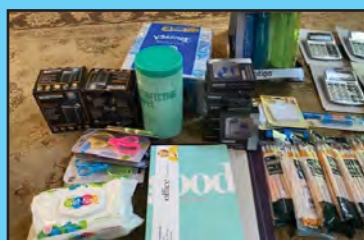
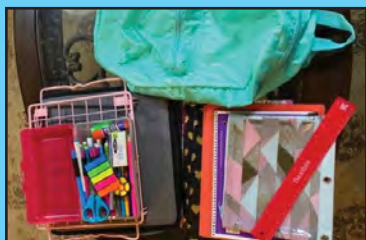




Laasya Bonthu, Anjali Baratham and Sruthi Kode presenting donations to Olathe Medical Center staff



Sruthi Kode



Donations collected by Pencils for Success Kansas sent to Olathe elementary schools

PENCILS FOR SUCCESS

Olathe Student Makes A Community Impact

During the spring of 2020, when Olathe families were adapting to more time at home, Sruthi Kode, Olathe North High School junior, used newfound time to do something useful and make a positive impact in her community. After discovering that millions of families in the United States struggle to afford school supplies each year, Sruthi wanted to do everything in her power to provide equal opportunities for education in her own backyard.

Sruthi started a local chapter of Pencils for Success, a nonprofit organization founded in Georgia, with three other juniors: Bani Grover, Olathe North; Anjali Baratham and Laasya Bonthu, Blue Valley Northwest High School. Pencils for Success (PFS) accepts donations of new or gently-used school supplies and distributes them in targeted areas of need.

As the Olathe School District has 10 Title I elementary schools, Sruthi reached out to the district in August to see how her group could deliver school supplies for students. After several weeks of carefully gathering donations, PFS Kansas provided a bevy of supplies to all 10 Title I elementary schools.

"I'm driven to donate to underprivileged communities because I want to help those in need," Sruthi said. "Many students like me, who just want a good education, deserve the necessary supplies and materials to learn."

While the main focus remains on students in the classroom, Sruthi's group participates in other community service projects throughout the year. Recently, they donated baked goods and thank you cards to frontline workers at Olathe Medical Center. To help raise funds, PFS Kansas sold homemade polymer clay earrings.

"I love doing what I can to give back to the community in any way possible," Sruthi said. "If any student is interested in helping others in need or getting involved in their community, go for it. Find out what you are most passionate about and go make a positive impact on the world."

To contact or donate supplies to the Kansas chapter of Pencils for Success, email pencilsforsuccesskansas@gmail.com or connect with the group on social media @pencilsforsuccess.ks on Instagram or Facebook.

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