



OLATHE PUBLIC SCHOOLS USD 233

School News

Fall 2021



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to School!

Q&A with the New
Superintendent

Completed 2016
Bond Projects

Strategic Plan 2021-2026



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

How do you measure the success of the start of a school year? For me, it is seeing our students engaged in learning. Success looks like educators and staff enjoying their work, committed to helping students achieve. Success looks like the community participating in our schools. This school year has started off incredibly strong. I am grateful to our students, staff, parents and community members for supporting our schools and helping to make this year begin so well.

As we settle into a new school year, the Board of Education and district staff have also refocused on the district’s strategic plan and its goals. This important document focuses our work and helps direct our efforts as we work to reach our goals of high academic expectations for all, behavior and social emotional learning for all, human capital and effective systems and prioritized resources. You can read more about the strategic plan in this issue of School News. You can also read more at www.olatheschools.org/strategicplan.

On a personal note, as our superintendent, I want to thank you for entrusting me with the most important resource we have in our community: our children. It is a great honor to lead the Olathe Public Schools. This district is the place my family has called home for many years, it is the place where my own children attend school, and I am truly proud to live and work in this community. Thank you for your support of the Olathe Public Schools.

Dr. Brent Yeager,
Superintendent

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Meet the New Superintendent: Q&A with Dr. Brent Yeager

Dr. Brent Yeager took over the helm of superintendent in July, but he's been an employee of the district for more than 15 years. He began his career in the Olathe Public Schools in 2007 as principal of Fairview Elementary. He became the Executive Director of Elementary Education in 2011 and then Assistant Superintendent of Learning Services in 2018. He has 22 years of experience in education and, most importantly, a great love for the Olathe Public Schools, its students and staff.

Q: What do you love about being the superintendent of the Olathe Public Schools?

A: There is no better job on the face of the Earth. I'm thoroughly convinced of that. My wife and I moved to Olathe over 20 years ago where we bought our first home, and from that time, there has been no other place that we'd rather live or rather work. This is a wonderful community and I couldn't ask for a better opportunity to work with a supportive community, amazing educators, hardworking staff and kids who are just awesome.

Q: Tell us about your family.

A: I'm blessed to have an amazing, supportive wife who is also an educator in Olathe. I have two children in the district. My daughter is a seventh grader and my son is a 10th grader. One of the reasons why I'm invested in our community and our schools is because my kids are the beneficiaries of the work that we do here each and every day.

Q: What are you most excited about this school year?

A: This year is not only going to be a great opportunity for us to have our kids, families and our community engaged in our schools around learning, but also a great opportunity to re-establish relationships and focus on the things we do so well in the Olathe Public School District.

Q: What do you love the most about the Olathe Public Schools?

A: Honestly, it's the people - the adults, the kids, and our entire community. We treat people in the Olathe Public Schools in a way that shows that we have dignity and respect and caring for all people. This is a place where we can do hard things, but we can also take care of people at the same time.

Q: If you could say anything to the children of the Olathe Public Schools, what would it be?

A: If I could say anything to the children of the Olathe Public Schools, it would be, "We've got you." Our students need to know that we have their back. We care about them and we want them to learn at the highest levels possible. But we also know that we need to develop trusted relationships in order for our students to truly succeed and reach their fullest potential. We need to know who they are and what they care about so at the end of the day our students can confidently say, "They got me."



Step Up graduate Cleo Mija with her granddaughter who graduated kindergarten from Olathe Public Schools.



Step Up graduate Manuel Marin accepts his Olathe Public Schools diploma at the Step Up graduation ceremony.



Manuel Marin poses with fellow Step Up graduates Mercedes Estrada (L) and Cleo Mija (R).

Step Up Program Inspires Learners of All Ages to Reach Goals

Proudly dressed in his graduation cap and gown, 75-year-old Manuel Marin takes his final step across the graduation stage, and a “Step Up” in his educational journey. For Marin, today represents a milestone more than 50 years in the making. Today, Marin will receive his high school diploma from Olathe Public Schools as part of the district’s Step Up program for adult learners.

This tuition-free diploma completion program provides adult Kansas residents the opportunity to finish their educational journey, no matter where they are in life, through the flexible, self-paced curriculum. Marin is one of 105 adult learners from the Step Up Class of 2020 and Class of 2021 celebrating successful completion of their high school diploma and one of nearly 50 graduates who attended the traditional commencement ceremony in the spring of 2021. For all graduates, including Marin, this celebration represents the culmination of years of hard work and the opportunity to reach his fullest potential.

“Growing up as one of seven kids, we were expected to enter the work force at a young age to help sustain our family, so I only got to grade 9,” Marin said. “All my adult life I didn’t give school a second thought until the program Step Up was presented to me. We are fortunate to have a program like Step Up to help nontraditional students accomplish this important milestone in our lives. Thank you, Olathe Public Schools. I am forever grateful.”

Kansas residents may enroll in Step Up if they are over age 18 and their high school classes have already graduated. Kansans with a GED certificate are also welcome. The self-paced program is designed to meet learners of all ages and backgrounds, and provides students the flexibility they need to complete the program on their own time.

“The flexibility in my case was huge because of my work schedule,” Marin said. “I started the program when I was 65 years young, and while it took me a long time to complete, it proved to me and my family that anything is possible if you’re persistent and are willing to work around any obstacles you encounter,” Marin said. “This diploma gives me the opportunity to further my education if I choose to and it is a good example to those around me. For those considering the program, I would tell them to ‘Step Up’ and do yourself a favor by entering and completing the program. Your hard work will pay off!”

Step Up is fully aligned with Kansas curriculum standards and is designed to prepare students for post-secondary education or for direct job placement/advancement. The Step Up program is currently enrolling for the fall 2021 semester. To learn more or to enroll, visit www.olatheschools.org/stepup, contact Step Up administrators at 913-780-7880 or send an email to stepup@olatheschools.org.

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Olathe Public Schools Relaunches Strategic Plan 2021-2026

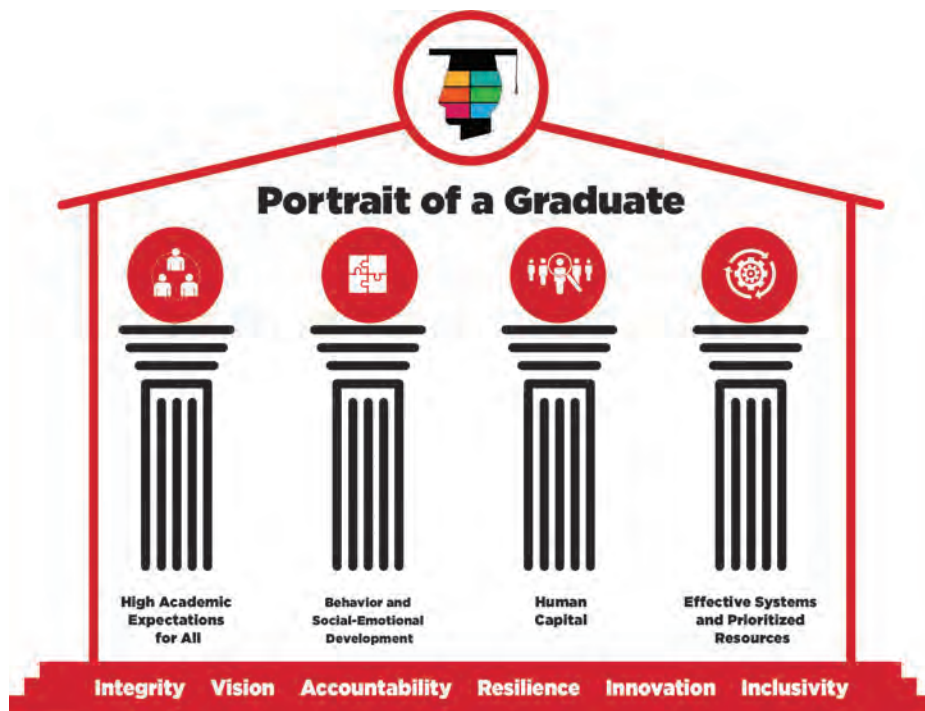
The Olathe Public Schools Board of Education has relaunched the district's strategic plan, with a renewed focus on the district's goals and core values.

The Olathe Public Schools Strategic Plan was originally launched in October 2019 and outlined the district's goals and core values to set the roadmap to help students achieve great success. With the pandemic slowing the momentum of the strategic plan, the board and district administration chose to relaunch the five-year plan and refocus on the important goals and work within it.

An important key of the strategic plan is the Portrait of a Graduate (POG), which outlines what we want our students to know and be able to do when they graduate from our schools. The new strategic plan provides the path and steps the organization needs to follow to help our students achieve the competencies outlined in the POG: critical thinking and problem solving; resilience and social and emotional well-being; creativity and innovation; communication; initiative and self-direction; and social and cross-cultural skills.

Additionally, the relaunched plan includes important goals around diversity, engagement and inclusion. These priority areas include providing professional development to increase cultural awareness of staff and students to ensure a welcoming, safe and equitable community for all students and staff.

"We are very excited for the relaunch of the strategic plan," Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education Tim Reves said. "Through the process of relaunching this plan, we have renewed our commitment to operationalizing the language of the strategic plan across our district. It now must become a part of our everyday work and the critical nature of what we do."



The four Olathe Public Schools strategic plan goals are:

- **High Academic Expectations for All:** Every student will be challenged and supported through tiers of instruction by all staff to achieve a high standard of academic performance and growth.
- **Behavior and Social-Emotional Development for All:** Every student will benefit from an educational experience that fosters their behavioral, social and emotional development.
- **Human Capital:** The district will attract, develop, engage and retain high quality talent.
- **Effective Systems and Prioritized Resources:** All systems and resources will be aligned based on organizational data to achieve strategic initiatives.

Core Values: Integrity, Vision, Accountability, Resilience, Innovation, and Inclusivity

Vision: Students Prepared for Their Future

Read more about the strategic plan at www.olatheschools.org/strategicplan.

Welcome Back To School



The Ally Project Inspires Students to Think Outside the Box

A commitment to helping others, a passion for education and a dream to make a positive impact on kids who are fighting serious illness – that is the legacy of The Ally Project. A partnership between the Olathe Public Schools Future Educators Academy (FEA), Children’s Mercy and the Kauffman Foundation, The Ally Project was inspired by former Olathe East High School and FEA student Ally Baier, who was diagnosed with glioblastoma cancer as a child and passed away in May 2020. The Ally Project is a way for future teachers to provide educational support to children just like Ally who are fighting cancer or facing extended hospitalization. It is a project that Ally helped build.

“The Ally Project started when Olathe student Ally Baier was accepted into FEA,” said Shelley Staples, 21st Century Future Educators Academy facilitator. “When Ally was undergoing treatment as a ninth grader in the FEA program, she shared with me that this program would not only give kids a chance to be educated, no matter how sick they are, but that it also would feel good to know people are still being educated even if they’re in the hospital.”

Through The Ally Project, students in the FEA program provide tutoring and mentoring at Children’s Mercy in combination with the full-time teachers on staff at the hospital. Last school year, due to COVID-19, the program was not able to continue in its traditional structure, but that did not prevent Olathe students from giving back to those in need.

“With COVID-19, all of our tutoring sessions were canceled and there were several changes to how education looked in general with the switch to remote learning,” Staples said. “Ally passed away in May 2020 and I wanted to honor her legacy by continuing the project in some way. I thought about Ally and how, oftentimes, people would gift care packages with food to patients. We decided to make these, but instead of food, include learning activities to reach out to students and let them know they are being thought of while also improving their learning.”

Staples challenged her class to design their own “learning boxes” to share with students during the 2020-21 school year. Each box featured eight activities to align with the multiple intelligences theory, as defined by Howard Gardner. The theory suggests that there are eight distinct types of intellectual competencies that individuals may possess including naturalist, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, intra-personal, linguistic and spatial.

“I first piloted the learning boxes with our seniors and wanted to stretch their creativity while challenging them,” Staples said. “I told them they could pick any theme and include eight different activities. In FEA, we focus a lot on making sure all students are successful

and that students have different strengths and intelligence. By making a box with lots of different activities, a patient would hopefully find some they would enjoy.”

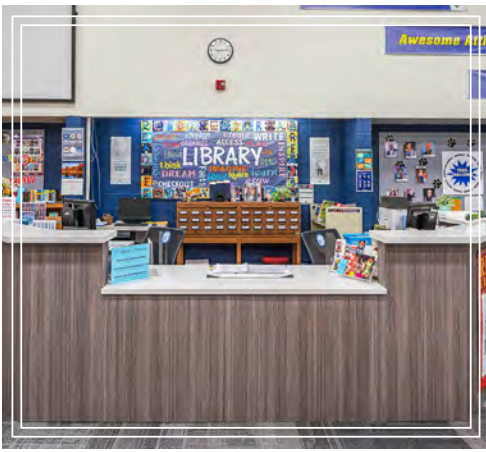
From a kindness-themed learning box including activities like painting kindness rocks and writing thank you notes, to a Harry Potter-themed box that combined the magical world of fiction with real-world learning—there were activities and themes to meet the needs of any learner. For Staples and her

FEA students, being able to honor Ally and continue to make a positive impact on the community, despite COVID-19, made all the difficulties of a trying year worthwhile.

“We love Ally Baier and we love helping kids,” Staples said. “With COVID-19, everyone’s lives were disrupted, and school has been changed forever. Many of us had a very small social bubble and this left many children in the hospital isolated and without peers. The Ally Project is about making sure every child has an ‘Ally,’ and that shouldn’t ever change. We knew this is something Ally would have enjoyed, and I think the students really enjoyed getting to be creative. This required a lot of thinking outside the box and it was really cool to see the themes and how they made each activity work.”

Students in the FEA program will continue creating learning boxes as part of The Ally Project in the 2021-22 school year.





Oregon Trail library received updated carpeting and a new circulation desk as part of the 2016 Bond project work over the summer.



The 2016 Bond provided funds to build the district's 36th elementary school, Canyon Creek.



Bond 2016 funds helped renovate the Mill Creek Campus to accommodate growth of the Prairie Learning Center.

Olathe Completes 2016 Bond Projects with Reinvestment into District Facilities

The start of a new school year is always filled with excitement, anticipation, and this year, it also brought brand new updates to facilities, technology and safety needs across the district, all thanks to a \$156 million bond issue approved by voters in 2016.

“As part of our continued construction in the 2016 bond issue, we completed 35 projects this summer,” said Executive Director of Facilities and Operations Travis Palangi. “These summer projects mark the completion of projects funded by the 2016 bond issue and nearly four years of work on important updates to district facilities.”

2016 Bond projects completed over the summer consisted of carpet replacement, wood gym floor refinishing, seamless resinous flooring installation, cabinetry replacement, roofing replacement and HVAC replacement across 24 facilities.

In addition to the work completed this summer, the 2016 Bond package also included enhancements to safety and security in building entrances and security cameras, renovations to Mill Creek Campus to accommodate growth of the Prairie Learning Center, updates to technology devices and improvement of district infrastructure, replacement of aging flooring in elementary gymnasiums and more.

With the 2016 Bond project complete, the district looks toward the future needs of the district and is in the initial stages of planning for the next bond election.

“We are so grateful to our Olathe community for their support and passage of this bond, as this is one of the only opportunities we have as a district to procure funding that allows us to repair aging facilities, enhance safety and security within our classrooms and district buildings, and update existing technology and physical classroom spaces to better meet the needs of our students,” said John Hutchison, deputy superintendent Business and Finance. “As we consider the needs of our district moving forward, we look forward to

partnering with our community to gather input and guide our work and the possibility of a bond in the future.”

To learn more about the district’s bond election history and past projects, visit the District Overview section of the Olathe Public Schools website at www.olatheschools.org.

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