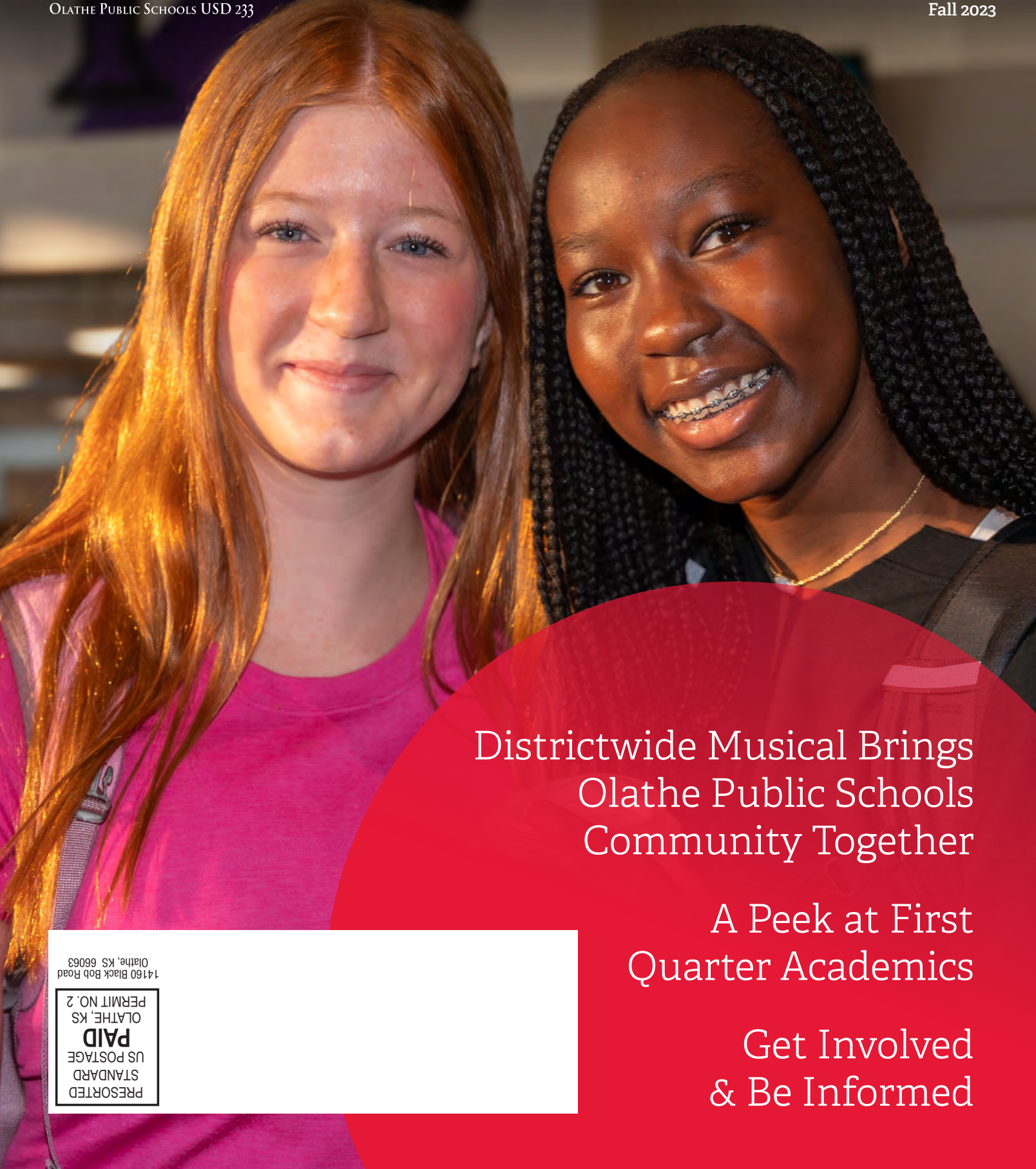




School News

OLATHE PUBLIC SCHOOLS USD 233

Fall 2023



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Olathe Public Schools
Community Together

A Peek at First
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A Message From **SUPERINTENDENT DR. BRENT YEAGER**

In the 2023-24 school year, our district is inviting our community to move “Forward Together” - to lock arms and take steps forward as a team of students, staff, families and community members. Our three key initiatives for the year we want to move toward are high academic achievement and growth, dedicated parent and community engagement, and a strengthened culture of belonging for our students and staff.

Inside this issue, you will get a peek into our Olathe Transition Supports Program for our 18-21-year-old students receiving Special Services instruction, as well as the process behind the district’s academic data-driven decisions. Look for updates on the open enrollment legislation and potential changes to the start and end times on page 8. Finally, on page 9, take a look at the collage of photos from the first day of school back in August and read about the districtwide musical experience that embodied the spirit of #OPSEForwardTogether on page 5.

Thank you for your continued support of the Olathe Public Schools. We had over 60,000 visitors in the 2022-23 school year and we are hopeful to welcome even more of our community back in our schools this year. Make sure to check out the list of ways to get involved on page 8!

Sincerely,

Dr. Brent Yeager
Proud Superintendent of Olathe Public Schools

The district will use #OPSEForwardTogether on social media to document our growth together.

Follow along on social media by clicking the hashtag on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, and be sure to tag #OPSEForwardTogether in your social media posts!



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Student Attends National Hispanic Leadership Learning Experience in Washington, D.C.



This summer, Olathe Northwest High School senior Brandon Santiago-Ramos attended “Caminos al Futuro,” a fully-funded nationwide summer program for pre-college students who have a high level of academic achievement and a demonstrated commitment to service and leadership within the Hispanic/Latino community.

Located at The George Washington University (GW) in Washington, D.C., Caminos al Futuro is an immersive learning experience where scholars examine the social, economic and political transformations affecting the Hispanic/Latino community in a college-like environment. Participants get to see policymaking in action with visits to Congress, government agencies and leaders in non-profits as well as lectures from university professors and national Hispanic/Latino leaders.

“It was a very fun experience,” Santiago-Ramos said. “I loved being able to connect with a group of Latino kids from around the nation and be able to bounce ideas off of each other.”

Each student was allowed to bring one adult family member or mentor with them for the final presentation and closing ceremony of the program. Santiago-Ramos invited Elizabeth Janzen, his Spanish teacher and Hispanic Leadership Club sponsor at Olathe Northwest.

“It was a wonderful experience because I was one of the only mentors there because the rest were parents,” Janzen said. “It was a privilege that Brandon invited me and to be able to see him present his community project with self-confidence in both Spanish and English. It was very impressive.”

Time in the classroom was spent with university professors and Hispanic/Latino leaders, identifying issues related to Hispanics/Latinos in their home communities and developing community action projects to address those challenges. Students were encouraged to leverage their own cultural competence and think about how to uniquely address the needs of their community.

“The program does a really good job giving you different

Latino experiences, not just in politics but with Latinos in every workspace,” Santiago-Ramos said. “I feel like it really showed the students that Latinos are everywhere, and you can accomplish anything.”

Each participant created a project that they could implement in their own city and community. Santiago-Ramos created a project based on one of his passions — soccer.

“My project is a soccer tournament where anybody can come play, and hopefully it’s going to be sponsored by our community,” Santiago-Ramos said. “My goal is for all Olathe businesses – Latino or not – to come in along with high schools and college admissions officers to give information to Latino families and show them there are opportunities out there.”

Along with soccer, Santiago-Ramos participates in the 21st Century Engineering Academy, Hispanic Leadership Club and Teen Council. Janzen had just met Santiago-Ramos last year, but she said his passion for his community is obvious.

“I knew he would be a great candidate for Caminos al Futuro. He has always been passionate about what he does, prepared in class, asking questions and trying to do things better, not just for himself but for the community too,” Janzen said. “One of the goals is that through this experience, he can generate support from the community to implement his soccer project, so more students and their families can be informed and take advantage of the variety of opportunities that Olathe Public Schools have like the 21st Century programs, OATC, etc. All of us have a part in helping our students be successful to achieve their dreams.”

After high school, Santiago-Ramos hopes to attend the University of Michigan, where he plans to major in engineering. For now, he is just grateful to have had the opportunity to work with great mentors and to have the chance to make an impact in the community.

“I know that there’s more out there for me and others in our community,” Santiago-Ramos said. “¡Sí se puede!”



I know that there’s more out there for me and others in our community.
¡Sí se puede!

Brandon Santiago-Ramos
Olathe Northwest High School senior





Districtwide Musical Brings Olathe Public Schools Community Together

In the heat of summer, Olathe Public Schools brought the snow with its first-ever districtwide theater production of “Disney’s Frozen, The Broadway Musical.” The production was a success with all six of their shows sold out at Olathe South High School from Aug. 16-20.

The show consisted of 140 students in the cast, crew and orchestra, across all 51 Olathe schools and with all grade levels represented. Olathe South theater teacher David Tate Hastings served as the producer while Olathe East High School theater teacher Edward Shafer directed the show.

“The goal was to strengthen our school community, provide outreach to underserved groups and support inclusion and diversity in our production, and I felt like we did this in every way,” Hastings said. “I am thankful for all the people that helped and supported us in this project.”

In 2022, a national contest called the “United States of Frozen,” put on by The Educational Theatre Association, Music Theatre International and Disney Theatrical Group, selected one high school from each state to be the first to produce the first full-length version of Frozen. Hastings and Shafer’s application was chosen, and Olathe Public Schools became the only district in the country to put on a districtwide version of the show.

The contest’s theme was “Love is an Open Door,” with the hope to strengthen their school communities and support diversity and inclusion in productions. Olathe North High School senior Tyler Taylor, who was cast as “Olaf,” said it was a great opportunity for Olathe students to come together and get to know each other.

“We didn’t know each other before the show, but I’ve gotten to meet a lot of new friends and it’s been awesome,” Taylor said. “With the theme ‘Love is an Open Door,’ everyone was really

accepting and just open.”

Auditions began in February but there was a lot of work to be done in the spring. Rehearsals began in July and all cast members, from elementary to high school, had to come with their lines and songs memorized. For Dana Davis, director of theater at Prairie Trail Middle School and the community relations manager for the production, it wasn’t surprising what they were able to accomplish with the amount of talent on board.

“From day one, I was overwhelmed by the talent in Olathe schools,” Davis said. “I have never seen a cast meld so quickly, and it’s so diverse and wonderful and I love everything about that.”

One or two of the many talented students from each of the 10 elementary schools and 36 middle schools were cast in the show. Olathe West High School senior Genevieve Anderson, who played the lead role of “Elsa,” said performing with the younger students brought back memories of when she was a kid.

“In high school theater I’m used to being around kids my own age, but it’s been nice to be around the young kids because they have this childlike bliss, especially with it being most of their first shows,” Anderson said. “It’s so magical to watch these kids feel the excitement of theater.”

Not only was the production a huge hit, but it showed that great things can happen when our community is unified.

“I think the key was bringing the community together, not just to produce the greatest show ever,” Hastings said. “When we work together and strive to lift others up, we end up creating greater things than we could on our own. This project showed that it is possible for us all to work together to create magic when we share our love with others.”

A Peek at First Quarter Academics

Preparation for the first day of school begins long before students step foot into the building in August. Olathe Public Schools educators aim to meet the specific individualized needs of all 29,000+ students. To do that, the Olathe Public Schools Learning Services Department steps in to support. This department encompasses assessment and curriculum, behavior and social emotional learning, instructional technology and library media, professional development and instructional coaching, as well as special services, and new educator and university partnerships. The team's objective is to provide support to staff, parents, and students to ensure all students are prepared for their future. Director of School Improvement and Assessments Dr. Julie Veatch says making data-driven decisions is one way to support the district as a whole.

"In the spring, we laid out exactly what our recent data is showing us that we need to focus on as a staff for the next school year," Dr. Veatch said. "This data is driven by FastBridge screeners, state assessments, the most recent best practices, initiatives coming out of the legislature such as changes to the graduation requirements, yearlong collected feedback from staff, and the more informal formative assessments our teachers are doing every day. This data points us to how we will prepare for the next year's district professional development, new educator training and then how our instructional coaches and building leaders will prepare for their specific students – all before the first day of school."

Before school starts, educators participate in professional learning to provide a consistent experience for all students districtwide. Director of Instructional Support Kelly Tines says this is a team effort.

"It is absolutely critical that our educators, from day one, whether they are new or not, feel like they understand what the teaching standards and goals are, as well as what they need to do for their specific students in order to ensure students are receiving a guaranteed and viable curriculum," Tines said. "To do this, we rely on our whole Learning Services team, Technology, Human Resources, and many other departments

within the district. It takes all of us working together to have a smooth start to the year."

From there, district coordinators and building instructional coaches work with each school to address their specific students' needs during several days of building professional development.



"We are reviewing their data from last year's assessments and screeners right off the bat," Dr. Veatch said. "Educators really want to understand, 'Hey, where was this student in math when they left us in May?' and 'What do we know about them as a learner and what supports can we put in place immediately to jumpstart their growth?'"

While the first couple of weeks of school are important for relationship building, educators are encouraged to start on academic content as soon as they feel students are ready to learn.

"Our district prioritizes conducting a FastBridge screener well before the first quarter is over so we can immediately address the learning gaps or identify any new students who may need interventions quickly," Dr. Veatch said. "Whether they

are a student who is on grade level but missing one concept, or a student who is missing multiple concepts — this screener is invaluable and helps us pinpoint exactly what intervention a student will need to be successful now and later on in the year."

Educators, administrators and instructional coaches take this FastBridge data and their day-to-day observations to provide a system of supports for each individual student. While screeners are important, our teachers' goal is to use data as just one of the ways they identify what a student needs. Schools are encouraged to celebrate both building-wide and individual academic growth.

"Our goal is that every student knows what they are learning, why they are learning it and to be celebrated for how they are growing," Dr. Veatch said. "We want students to go to their teacher, families, and friends and say, 'I get it! I know; I get it!' That lightbulb moment is what we all strive for. It is why educators do what they do. And it's what we think about all the way back in the spring when preparing for the fall."

Olathe Transition Supports Program Builds Confidence and Vocational Skills

Jack McCaskill, known for his big heart and willingness to take on any challenge, is thriving in the Olathe Transition Supports Program (OTSP).

OTSP is the transition campus for the Focus On Careers and Unique Skills (FOCUS) and Adult Career Community Education Services Supports (ACCESS) programs. OTSP provides opportunities to prepare 18-21-year-old students to lead independent, productive, and satisfying lives. Students engage in experiences to promote independence and prepare them for the next phase of life.

Jack was born with Down syndrome and takes part in the ACCESS program, where he has worked at a variety of jobs to develop his skills. During the day, students come to OTSP to learn different vocational and life skills, take classes at Johnson County Community College, and then they spend the rest of the day at work alongside a job coach. Jack's dad, Mark McCaskill, believes the program has grown his confidence.

"He comes home feeling like he has a purpose and I've noticed that he's developed a sense of pride in doing a good job every day," McCaskill said. "He's multi-dimensional, smart and has continuously surpassed everyone's expectations for him all his life. I've learned to never put limits on him. From getting up on his own, making his breakfast, preparing his lunch and being ready for his ride every morning. Then he takes that positive can-do attitude to work."

One of Jack's favorite places to work was Red Robin because it gave him a chance to work as part of a team. He was known for "running circles" around his coworkers with a smile on his face.

"I love Red Robin," Jack said. "I like working with the customers at Red Robin. I like teamwork. I like the way we work together. We cleaned the tables, worked with customers, sweeping and doing other jobs. I love it all."

That is one word you will hear when talking to Jack: love. He loves his teachers and the friends he made both at his alma mater Olathe East High School and at OTSP. He is a big fan of



his ACCESS teacher, Jackie Houghton, who he says is "very nice and always makes people smile, especially me." Houghton believes Jack has become more confident not only in his work skills, but also in his ability to be a strong self-advocate.

"I think our job as educators is preparing students for their future, or their life after school so that they can become happy and fulfilled members of society," Houghton said. "Our role looks different depending on the age of the students and we may not ever get to see exactly where our students land in life, but that is what makes my job special. I get to see the culmination of all the years of work from the educators before me and be there as the students take their first steps into the 'real world.'"

Jack's father said the job experience and the built-in community his son is receiving is invaluable.

"I love everything from the transportation company who picks him up, the staff in all areas, and all the different types of job exposure he's receiving," McCaskill said. "I can't tell you how impressed we've been with Olathe East and the transition into OTSP. Prior to moving here Jack was not that excited about school. That totally changed as he suddenly couldn't wait to get to school every morning. His teachers at OTSP and Olathe East changed his life. They are amazing people. This community feels like a family. They do it right!"

“

[Jack] comes home feeling like he has a purpose and I've noticed that he's developed a sense of pride in doing a good job every day.

”

Mark McCaskill

Jack's dad

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Read our family e-newsletter, the "Insider."



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Be Informed

Re-engaging the School Start and End Time Discussion

During the 2023-23 school year, the Olathe Public Schools embarked on a multilayered process to study a shift in school start and end times to help provide equal access to educational opportunities for all and address the local and national bus driver shortage causing transportation challenges for the district.

Olathe Public Schools plans to reconvene this conversation around a change to school start and end times this fall with a targeted focus on community input and collaboration. Parents and staff have been asked to provide feedback on new schedule options for the 2024-25 school year through an online survey. Additionally, the district has engaged committees at all three levels (early childhood/elementary, middle and high school) comprised of teachers, parents, administrators and certified and classified staff members. These committees have been tasked with reviewing schedule options, assessing survey feedback and diving into challenges and opportunities each schedule presents to help identify a schedule recommendation and implementation plan to present to the Board of Education.

The district's goal is to recommend a new 2024-25 start/end time schedule for Board of Education approval by the end of the semester. This would provide the district, families and staff with a full semester and summer to make necessary plans and adjustments for the new schedule to roll out in the 2024-25 school year.

For more information and for the latest updates, visit www.olatheschools.org/startandendtime.

Open Enrollment

This fall, Olathe Public Schools is engaging in a conversation around recent legislation that was passed at the state level (House Bill 2567) requiring all public school districts in the state to implement a policy for open enrollment to take effect for the 2024-25 school year. As the district develops its policy on this matter, we want to ensure our community understands the basics of open enrollment and what it could mean for our students.

What is Open Enrollment?

Per Kansas legislation, open enrollment allows students to attend public schools outside of their assigned attendance zones. In other words, if a student resides in one district or a specific area within a district, they might have the option to enroll in another school or district if space permits.

What Factors will be Considered in the District's Policy Around Open Enrollment?

Several factors will be considered as the district creates its policy around open enrollment, including building capacity, grade level capacity, impact on internal transfers, the internal transfer window, and more.

All school districts must adopt their own policy and procedures to accommodate the new open enrollment law by Jan. 1, 2024. With this in mind, the district will hold a public hearing this fall with the intention of bringing a policy before the Board of Education for approval by the December 2023 meeting.

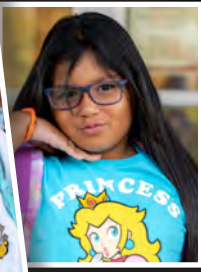
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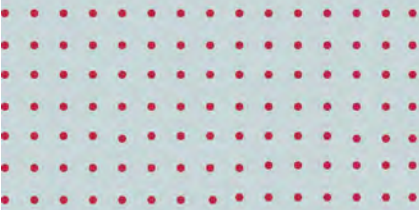
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