

School NEWS



WINTER 2018



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**WOMEN'S GIVING CIRCLE EMPOWERS
WOMEN AND DISTRICT**

**RIDGEVIEW TEACHERS BRING TOKYO TO
OLATHE**

**CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION:
PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THEIR FUTURE**

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A Message From **SUPERINTENDENT JOHN ALLISON**

This is an exciting time in the Olathe Public Schools. Right now, we are embarking on a journey to develop a new strategic vision to guide our work. The world is changing and we need to help our students be ready for whatever the world looks like 15, 20, 30 years from now.

Our students will work in jobs and will use technology that hasn't even been created yet. When this year's seniors, our class of 2019, started kindergarten, there were no selfie sticks, or Spotify. There was no such thing as Airbnb, or Snapchat, Facebook, Pinterest, iPhones or iPads. Technology isn't the only thing that has evolved. Jobs have changed.

When today's seniors, the class of 2019, were in kindergarten, jobs like drone pilot, social media manager and cloud architect didn't exist. This year, as we embark on strategic planning, we are starting with the end in mind. As our students walk across the stage at graduation, what do we want our students to know and be able to do?

We have been studying this very topic with a group of stakeholders. Staff, parents, community leaders have come together to think through this important part of our strategic plan. Our goal is to create a Portrait of a Graduate to drive our strategic plan and to help guide it for years to come.

If we want to continue the relentless pursuit of excellence, we can't do it with complacency. We have to create a plan that can evolve as our students' needs change. We have to continue to evolve as a school system if we want to continue to prepare our students for their future.

I will continue to share updates as we work through the strategic planning process. Thank you for your support.

**John Allison,
Superintendent**

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Members of the Women's Giving Circle gather twice annually to award grants.



Winners of the fall 2018 grant pose with members of the Women's Giving Circle.

WOMEN'S GIVING CIRCLE EMPOWERS WOMEN AND DISTRICT



Amazing things happen when women gather has been the mantra for the past four years for the Olathe Public Schools Foundation's Women's Giving Circle. In the spring of 2014, 50 women gathered to hear three presentations each detailing how a \$5,000 grant would benefit a program, classroom or a pilot collaboration project. Each woman donated \$100 and then voted for the most influential project. This successful pilot has now become a staple for the group, growing to more than 160 women in membership, funding grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$15,000 and has even garnered a second gathering each year.

The Women's Giving Circle has fully funded 10 projects and has provided \$5,000 to seed funding for four additional grants. Some donors were so moved by presentations that after a gathering, funds were donated to projects that didn't receive the winning votes.

"We launched the Women's Giving Circle as we wanted an impactful way to connect women to the needs of our students," Olathe Public Schools Foundation Executive Director Cindy VonFeldt said. "A beautiful part of the gatherings is the way the group works together to accomplish great things. Not everyone can write a check for \$10,000 but by joining together, they can be a part of funding a bigger project, chosen by them."

Sustaining Members Nancy Ingram and Kristin Schultz were instrumental in co-founding the initiative. "Cindy (VonFeldt) attended a conference and came back with the idea and we jumped at the opportunity to help create this program," Ingram said. "We knew the giving circle had the potential to be extraordinary and support a broad base of programming in the district."

To date, the Women's Giving Circle has funded \$126,500 in grants and an additional \$33,437 of post-event grants. In four years, this circle of influential women has personally placed nearly \$160,000 into Olathe classrooms.

The initiative quickly grew and right away a second event held each spring was scheduled. Each fall, the Women's Giving Circle funds a needs-based grant for \$10,000 and in the spring, the group funds an innovation-based grant for \$15,000.

Sustaining Members of the Women's Giving Circle are members who financially commit to be a part of the two gatherings each year. There are 128 Sustaining Members and for many, participation in this group is a powerful way to give back to the school district.

"The opportunity to make a relatively small investment in our public schools and our community brings a huge return," said Sustaining Member Kathy Brogden. "Coming together with other women to provide such a positive impact on students, teachers and our community is rewarding. It's inspiring to see the passion and dedication of the professionals who give so much to the students and families they serve."

Ingram says the feeling of accomplishment is great but there is always a need to fill.

"Our hope for the future is that women will continue to share the passion we have for public education and its value to the greater good in our community," Ingram said. "Many sustaining members no longer have children in the district but see this as a way to support today's students in their classrooms, for which we are grateful. Amazing things truly do happen when women gather and we are proof of that."

In April 2019, the Olathe Public Schools Foundation's Women's Giving Circle will gather once again and vote on an innovative project. They are currently scheduling a location and are welcoming new members. If you'd like to be a part of the Women's Giving Circle, please contact the foundation office at (913) 780-8222. For more information, visit the Olathe Public Schools Foundation website www.olathepublicschoolsfoundation.org.

RIDGEVIEW TEACHERS BRING TOKYO TO OLATHE

Students at Ridgeview

Elementary are becoming students of the world and expanding their global awareness. One particular area of focus is Asian culture and thanks to two Ridgeview staff members, Tokyo has been experienced in the classroom.

Inspired by classes offered through Olathe Public Schools and presented by the University of Kansas Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, East Asian History and Culture for Teachers, Lourdes Bass, kindergarten teacher, and Dawn Mercer, library media specialist, traveled to Tokyo for a nine-day seminar. Through a competitive application process, only five schools in the United States were chosen for the seminar.

“We spent last spring taking an online class through the University of Colorado at Boulder Program for Teaching East Asia, where we learned a great deal about Japanese history, geography, cultural beliefs and teaching and learning in Japan,” Bass said. “As part of the program, our school was given books and materials for our students to use and to help develop lesson plans.”

Before the trip, Bass taught Japanese songs and numbers to her kindergarten students and compared Japanese culture through children’s literature. Mercer had students conduct research and give presentations on Japanese culture compared to American culture.

In June, Bass and Mercer visited four elementary schools in the Tokyo metropolitan area and spent time at Haramachi Elementary. As part of the tour, they visited various children’s literature sites in Tokyo which correlated with the books they had received from Tokyo students in the spring.

During their stay, Bass and Mercer stayed in a hotel with



Dawn Mercer and Lourdes Bass pose with a book sent from students at Ridgeview Elementary.

#ZERO REASONS WHY

COUNTYWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION INITIATIVE KICKS OFF

Raising awareness and breaking the stigma of suicide is the driving force behind a countywide initiative dubbed #ZeroReasonsWhy. The six superintendents from the Johnson County school districts have partnered with the mental health community and other community leaders to work together on this important topic.

This initiative is designed to bring together the entire community to work toward raising awareness on the topic and increase prevention of suicide. The efforts will center around grassroots engagement led by student ambassadors, parent volunteers, teacher advocates, health experts and more. Public service announcements will be shared among social media channels using the hashtag #zeroreasonswhy and on the www.zeroreasonswhy.org website.

Additionally, multiple tiers of support and cross-district support programs will be strengthened and in some places established to help families in need. Another goal of the Zero Reasons Why campaign is to collaborate with mental health practitioners and their efforts to ensure those in need of service can find an avenue. Collaboration allows services and outreach to be focused and eliminate duplicated efforts. Regardless of a student's location in the county, a family should be able to have the same continuity of care and receive needed help. Placing resources in the hands of students and parents enables the healing to begin.

"This is a community issue, not just a school issue," Superintendent John Allison said. "We are going to have to come together to bring everyone to the table to have this conversation. It has to start with a large community effort to bring the issue to the forefront to say we do have an issue, it's OK to talk about this and we have to talk about this. This is going to have to be an ongoing conversation and effort if we are going to making the headway we need to make for our children."



Haramachi Elementary and students in Japan.



Mercer and Bass in Tokyo

nine other teachers from different areas of the United States and were able to collaborate with plans for their own classrooms. The trip also included a home visit where they were able to go home with a student, meet their family and experience their home life.

"One of the most interesting things that we learned was how the teacher is not the authority and how students share responsibility for classroom management," Bass said. "A component of the Japanese education system is Tokkatsu, which is educating the whole child. Japanese students learn responsibility through activities like cleaning the school and serving lunch to their peers."

Ridgeview students helped Mercer and Bass by preparing topics to present to Haramachi Elementary students. Students researched U.S. symbols and wrote short stories on topics as a cultural exchange of information.

"Having the opportunity to be a part of this unique experience has enabled me to learn about, and then be totally immersed in, a culture so different from ours," Mercer said. "It has given me a new perspective of the Japanese culture and how the history and geography of their country has shaped this culture. Through this ongoing partnership, I can help my students on their journey to becoming competent, capable and contributing global citizens."



LiNK GRANT PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES TO LOOK AT LITERACY IN NEW WAYS



Literacy lessons, like phonological awareness, make a tremendous impact our learners.

Olathe teachers are thinking differently about literacy thanks to a Literacy Network of Kansas (LiNK) grant to advance literacy from birth through grade 12. The district will receive federal funds in the amount of \$3,225,500 over the next three years to work on professional development and project implementation geared toward creating and strengthening literacy networks in Kansas.

“Our student population is changing and when we look at the types of learners we have now, we are exploring how to best fit their needs, engage them in authentic learning opportunities, and relate their experiences in education to the real world. Student voice and choice is a priority. We also want to empower teachers with knowledge in different areas of literacy and this grant is helping accomplish this vision,” K-5 English/Language Arts/Title 1 Coordinator Linda Boxberger said.

One large focus of the LiNK grant is providing more exposure and experiences to children birth to age 5. Through the grant funding, the district is partnering with community preschools and daycare centers by supplying books and building community bookshelves.

“The goal is to fill the bookshelves of our classrooms, community daycare centers, and homes of our youngest learners. This helps our kids to enter school already with that love of reading,” Early Childhood Special Services Administrator Kim Hawkins said.

Additionally, early childhood staff from the Olathe Public

Schools will be able to share resources and collaborate with community preschools and daycares to help start the conversation and exposure of literacy to our youngest learners.

Teachers across the district from early childhood through high school will receive intensive literacy training and use a consistent reading level system to make sure that students can be assessed in literacy consistently as they move through the system.

Staff will also be working in literacy Professional Learning Communities to share best practices and truly hone their literacy teaching and learning skills.

“Our teachers are able to receive vital foundational training that we wouldn’t have been able to afford without the grant. This grant has opened the door and allowed opportunities we might not have had without these monies,” Boxberger said. “With these new systems in place, everyone is talking the same language and it is our goal to sustain all of these initiatives after the grant money is done. We are building teacher knowledge and capacity throughout the district.”

District Secondary English/Language Arts Coordinator Kim Dahl is thrilled with the potential impact these literacy programs and initiatives can have on the district.

“Literacy isn’t really a subject, it’s a skill you need in life,” Dahl said. “It might look different in each subject. We are trying to build up our teachers’ capacity in all subjects in the area of literacy. We are strengthening and enhancing how we build the foundation for reading in Olathe.”

STUDENTS HELP BUILD THEIR OWN CLASSROOM

Students enrolled in the Construction Trades program are building the foundation of their program for years to come... literally. Recently the program required more room to accommodate large-scale projects and was given more space at the West Dennis Support Center. To make best use of the newly acquired space, a renovation needed to take place. Students are putting their construction skills to the test by creating their own classroom and work space.

Construction Trades is a two-year program located at the Olathe Advanced Technical Center (OATC) and provides students with hands-on construction experience. This program explores career, educational and employment opportunities while students spend three hours each day working in the shop and at the job site.

"We have outgrown the space at OATC and are fortunate to have this space available for our students and program," OATC Administrator Amy Stolz said.

In September, students began demo work removing walls and flooring. Students still have a traditional classroom in another area of the West Dennis Support Center and will use the newly constructed space as their indoor work space.

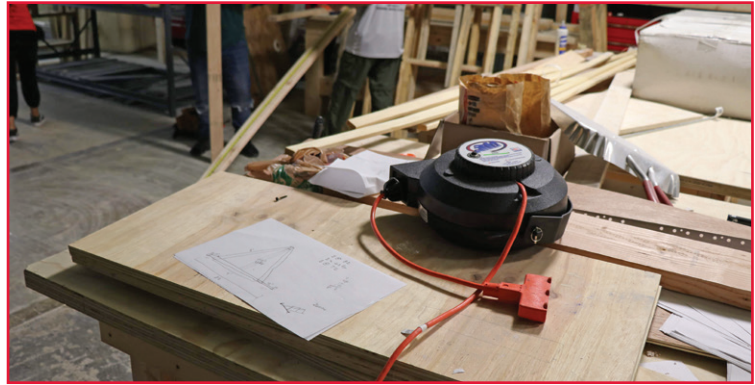
Construction Trades instructor Dave Pfortmiller said that other than using district electricians for the high-voltage work, students are providing the majority of the work. "Our second-year students will be designing a kitchen and master bath which will incorporate everything that they have learned thus far," Pfortmiller said. "Many community members on our advisory committee have been very gracious in donating materials for not only this project, but for upcoming projects to allow students to have hands-on experience."

By taking classroom lessons and applying them in real-life situations, students in the Construction Trades program are preparing for post-secondary careers upon completion of high school.

"This has been a project that the students are excited to be a part of. This is project-based learning in action," Stolz said. "We are so thankful for the help and guidance that has been provided by the Operations Service Center to make this renovation a success."



Students have a space to complete large projects at the West Dennis Support Center.



Students learn necessary skills as they work and learn on the job.



CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: *Preparing Students for Their Future*



Fourth-grade students were able to meet career professionals at the Careers on Wheels event.

As employment demands in the global workforce change by the year, Olathe Public Schools remains a dynamic leader in public education with its efforts in career and technical education. According to a 2017 study by Dell Technologies, 85 percent of the jobs that will exist in the year 2030 haven't even been invented yet. In educating students for their unknown future, Career and Technical Education (CTE) remains one of the fastest growing sections of the ever-evolving industry.

CTE promotes in-demand business and trade skills combined with soft skills which prepares students for high-skill, high-wage and high-demand careers. The Olathe School District provides 19 different CTE pathways for students to explore and expand their knowledge and technical skills to prepare for post-secondary and careers, most of which are available as part of the comprehensive offering at all high schools or Olathe Advanced Technical Center (OATC).

"Career and Technical Education classes help students to gain the technical skills and knowledge they need in an ever-changing workforce," Barbra Gonzales, Olathe Public Schools career and technical education coordinator, said. "Our teachers work closely with industry partners to ensure they are staying current with trends and training."

In addition, there are 15 diverse 21st Century Academies available for high school students, 10 of which are affiliated with a CTE pathway and five CTE pathways are available through the OATC.

To help reach young students beginning to show interest in a pathway, several CTE events take place throughout the school year to help further career exploration.

"The organization of these events takes a village and wouldn't be possible without support of community vendors," said Angie Salava, Olathe Public Schools college and career readiness and counseling services coordinator. "When students understand how their future relates to what they are doing in school, they are more likely to remain engaged, learn more and are more likely to complete high school."

These events are designed for various age groups and intended to jump-start student interest when planning for their future.



Students are exposed to career and educational opportunities across all areas of service and industry.

CAREERS ON WHEELS

In the fall, fourth-grade students on the east side of the district went to Olathe District Activities Center for a field trip with dozens of vendors from all corners of the workforce and student representatives from the 21st Century Academies. A second event will be held May 15, for fourth-graders on the west side of Olathe's attendance area.

CAREER EXPO

In October, all district eighth-grade students heard from approximately 50 community vendors, 21st Century Academies, and the Olathe Advanced Technical Center. The Career Expo was held at Johnson County Community College and students heard about careers and the education and training needed to hold specific jobs.

SEVENTH-GRADE CAREER PATHWAYS FAIR

In the spring, Prairie Trail Middle School will host the Seventh-Grade Career Pathways event open to all district seventh-grade students and their parents. This event highlights all high school options available to students as they begin to make decisions.

OLATHE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CAREER EXPO

High school juniors and seniors met with Olathe-area employers during this event held in late October. Employers who attended this event were interested in hiring students post-graduation or upon completion of a credential and students were able to create business contacts and learn more about careers in their community.

"Planning for these events begin almost as soon as they end," Salava said. "It is quite the undertaking."

With all the options available to students, these events also are intended to help students and parents make informed decisions. "These events our district offers are a great way for students to learn about all options available to them when they enter middle and high school," said Gonzales. "Transitioning to different levels of education can be intimidating for both students and parents. We hope these events help to offer information to make the transition easier."

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