

AN AUBURN-WASHBURN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT 437 PUBLICATION

SCHOOL news

Summer 2024



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www.usd437.net



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From the Board

Bryan Smith, Board of Education President

I am honored to have served as President of the Auburn-Washburn Board of Education for the past year – a year characterized by remarkable growth and transformation within the district. There were many defining moments, but perhaps most historic was the privilege of selecting the name, mascot, and colors for our second middle school. After considering feedback from thousands of survey respondents, listening session participants, and the middle school naming committee, the Board unanimously approved the following:

- **Name:** Washburn Rural North Middle School
- **Mascot:** Ravens
- **Colors:** Carolina Blue and Black

I am proud of the strategic effort that went into ensuring this process was as open and collaborative as possible, and I extend my sincere appreciation to everyone who participated in some way.

Construction of the second middle school is one of many projects initiated by the passing of the April 2022 bond

election. In the following pages, you will find detailed updates on each project and how those projects will enhance our service to students. Additional updates, including live cam footage, photos, and a timeline, are available online at www.usd437.net/bond.

Beyond overseeing these extensive construction and renovation projects, there is a laundry list of annual to-dos that occur every summer to ensure our school buildings are ready for the start of the new year in August. Those tasks include painting, cleaning, general building maintenance, and more. Summers are anything but slow in a public school district!

Thank you for your support of the Auburn-Washburn School District. I look forward to our continued partnership and the positive impact it will have on the district's ongoing success.



From the Superintendent

Dr. Scott McWilliams, Superintendent of Schools

Our students and staff consistently compete and perform at extremely high levels in a wide variety of events and arenas each year. I am often asked how we maintain such high levels of performance. The answer is simple: our community. Our achievements are possible because our entire community comes together and commits to excellence. When teachers, support staff, administrators, coaches, families, and the broader school community dedicate themselves to supporting our students, amazing things happen!

In this edition of *School News*, we proudly highlight some of the partnerships that exist between our schools and the community. Each of these partnerships helps to enrich the educational experience beyond our classroom walls. We are deeply grateful for these collaborations, and so many others not featured in these pages, because of the role they play in strengthening our bond with the community.

On the topic of community, I am excited to welcome a new principal to our district. Mike Haire will join us

this upcoming school year as principal of Washburn Rural Middle School. He succeeds Dr. Charlie Stoltenberg who has been named principal of Washburn Rural North Middle School.

Mr. Haire comes to us from Topeka Public Schools, where he has served as principal of Jardine Middle School since 2010. We are excited to have him on board and look forward to the positive impact he will make here in the Auburn-Washburn district!



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Jessica Roberts, Managing Editor

On the cover:

Students participate in an annual art lock-in event hosted by
Stephen Smith Gallery in downtown Topeka
Photo credit: Brad LeDuc

POINTS OF PRIDE

2023-2024 BY THE NUMBERS

9 STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

4-Speaker Debate 6A State Champions
(8th consecutive year)

Harris Chaudhry, Kavi Chidambaranathan,
Campbell Hight, and Aditi Nimashakavi

Girls Wrestling Team 6A State Champions

Boys Wrestling Individual 6A State Champions

132-pounds: Easton Broxterman
150-pounds: Kristjan Marshall
157-pounds: Brody Byrne

Boys Swimming Individual 6A State Champions

50-yard freestyle: Brogan Meier
500-yard freestyle: Jack Miranda

Boys Track & Field Individual 6A State Champions

Javelin throw: Josh Sulzen-Watson
4x400 meter relay: Shane Jueneman, Liam Morrison, Draden Chooncharoen, and Isaiah Terry

6

National Merit Scholar Semi-Finalists
(top 1% in nation)

3

National Merit Commended Scholars
(top 5% in nation)

#1

IN KANSAS

School Counselor of the Year
Hanna Mick

Kansas Chess Champions
K-12 Division
K-8 Division
K-5 Division

Biotechnician Assistant Credentialing Exam
First high school students in the state to pass the BACE exam

12

National History Day Qualifiers

6

Gold Key Scholastic Art Awards

3

Teacher Apprentices
participating in state pilot program



North American Candidate Experience Winner
(5th consecutive year)



Forbes America's Best-in-State Employer
(no. 13 among Kansas employers with 500+ employees)



#1 Ranked Public High School in Shawnee County, Kansas
(U.S. News & World Report)



Ranked no. 11 in the Country
(National Speech & Debate Association)

CLASS OF 2024

91

students with a 4.0 GPA or higher at commencement

15

International Baccalaureate diploma candidates

45

CTE Certificates
awarded in 8 different pathways

94%

Graduation Rate
compared to 88% state average



PHOTO BY BRAD LEDUC

FOSTERING ARTISTIC GROWTH

HOW ONE GALLERY OWNER IS MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ARTISTS

Many artists aspire to have their work showcased in a prestigious art gallery. Few realize that dream while still in high school. Thanks to the generosity of Stephen Smith, owner of Stephen Smith Gallery in downtown Topeka, dozens of Washburn Rural High School (WRHS) students can check that item off their bucket list.

For the past three years, Stephen Smith has hosted a lock-in event for advanced art students from WRHS. Over the course of seven hours, participants create original works of art that are then displayed in the gallery. Not only does Smith provide the canvases and all necessary art supplies, he ensures the students are well-fed. In fact, one of the highlights of the event is the ice cream treats enjoyed on the gallery's rooftop patio.

This year's lock-in took place on February 17 and featured instructor Edward Balda, a local artist who specializes in landscape painting. In addition to sharing painting techniques, Balda offered participants valuable insights about engaging with the art world on a professional level. Each lock-in explores a different concept, with this year's theme being "Atmospheric Perspectives." Each participant interpreted and executed a painting with that particular approach in mind. Their

works were unveiled at the Gallery's First Friday ArtWalk in March.

When asked why he hosts the lock-in, Smith shared that one of his visions is to introduce new artists to the Topeka area. "What better way to accomplish that than using the lock-in as a tool to work with high school art students who have exhibited a seriousness in developing their art," said Smith. Beyond that, "Knowing I play a part



PHOTO BY BRAD LEDUC

A total of 24 students participated in this year's lock-in at Stephen Smith Gallery.



in enhancing their art world understanding by offering a complete picture from creation to gallery exhibition to selling – that’s what makes my heart sing!”

THE BUSINESS OF ART

Not only does Smith provide the opportunity for students to create and showcase their work, but he also helps them sell it. “Stephen spends time with each student, helping them price their work and teaching them about the split pricing model that benefits both the artists and the galleries at which their work is displayed,” said Brad LeDuc, WRHS art teacher and 2013 winner of the prestigious Milken Educator Award.

For three students, in particular, those lessons paid off sooner than later. Their lock-in paintings have already been sold through the gallery. “Gravity” by WRHS senior Syd Laster was one of those works. “I was so excited to find out my piece sold, but I was also a little sad because I really loved that piece. It was a little hard to let go,” said Laster. “But it makes me happy to know that someone connects with something I created.”

BEYOND BUSINESS

A mutual admiration exists between LeDuc and Smith – two artists nurturing the next generation of Topeka talent. “Stephen is an incredible mentor, and we are immensely grateful for the opportunity he provides



PHOTO BY STEPHEN SMITH

Instructor Edward Balda shares painting techniques with lock-in participants.

our students year after year,” said LeDuc. In response, Smith could not help but share, “Brad is one of my favorite human beings. I can’t think of anyone better to coordinate this event with.”

While their sentiments reflect a deep respect for one another, it is ultimately the students who benefit the most. Having such passionate mentors to guide them through the business of art is a gift. “It’s so fun getting to spend time with people who share the same love of art,” said Laster. “I’m grateful for the opportunities and experience they provide.”

ABOUT STEPHEN SMITH GALLERY

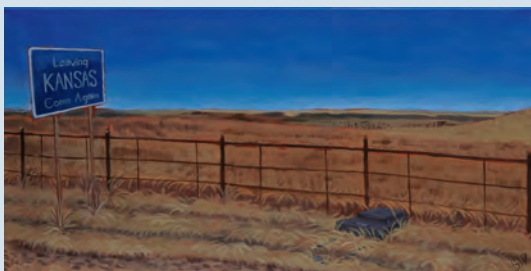
Stephen Smith opened a photography business in downtown Topeka in 1978. After decades operating Stephen Smith Images, he and his wife Edie converted much of their building to a fine art gallery in 2018. In the last six years, the gallery has shipped and delivered fine art from coast to coast, promoting the work of artists from right here in the heartland. ★



PHOTO BY BRAD LEDUC

Student participants hard at work on their lock-in masterpieces.

ON THE MOVE: SOLD PAINTINGS



“Gravity” by WRHS senior Syd Laster



“Jilted” by WRHS senior Maddie O’Brien



Washburn Rural North Middle School

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

BOND PROJECTS LEAD DISTRICT INTO NEW ERA

Guided by a comprehensive five-year strategic plan that was developed with input from thousands of stakeholders, the Auburn-Washburn school district is undergoing a historic transformation. The strategic plan, which extends through 2026, focuses on three key areas: enhanced career and technical education (CTE) opportunities, the reconfiguration of K-12 based on a comprehensive assessment of school capacity, and the expansion of early childhood education. A multi-phased construction effort spanning three years reflects these priorities and ensures every building in the district receives significant upgrades that will benefit students at all grade levels.

HIGH SCHOOL

The 50,000-sq. ft. Innovation Center at Washburn Rural High School is scheduled to open in October 2024. The state-of-the-art center will enhance teaching of real-world job skills in high-demand fields such as agriculture, architecture, bioscience, coding, computer science, construction, digital media, robotics, and more.

According to the United States Department of Education, eight years after high school graduation, students who focused on innovative CTE courses

while in high school had higher median annual earnings than students who did not focus on CTE. This data underscores the importance of these programs in shaping students' futures. By engaging in CTE, students not only gain theoretical knowledge but also practical experience, allowing them to develop and apply skills that employers highly value. As a result, they are better prepared to meet the demands of today's rapidly evolving job market.

Beyond the Innovation Center, the high school is undergoing renovations to many existing classrooms as well as the addition of a multipurpose activity center that will expand teaching and learning spaces during the day and offer practice and training opportunities after hours.



The Innovation Center at Washburn Rural High School

MIDDLE SCHOOL

A comprehensive assessment of school capacity and configuration revealed a significant opportunity to improve the student experience by constructing a second middle school. Transitioning from one middle school serving over 1,000 seventh- and eighth-grade students to two appropriately sized middle schools, each serving just over 600 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders, will better meet our students' needs. Located on the northeast corner of 29th Street and Auburn Road, Washburn Rural North Middle School will open for the 2025-2026 school year. The 140,000-sq. ft. building is being built with a focus on teaming and collaboration.



Washburn Rural North Middle School

Meanwhile, Washburn Rural Middle School is undergoing three phases of renovations — the first of which took place last summer when 24 classrooms were remodeled with new carpet, paint, operable walls, furniture, lighting, ceilings, and solar tubes. The next phase is underway now, with the science and special education classrooms being renovated.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

As sixth-grade students transition to middle school, space at each elementary school is being repurposed to better meet current needs. The first elementary school to undergo construction was Pauline Central, which saw the addition of a six-room early childhood center and Parents as Teachers room. By the end of this summer, all construction and renovation projects at Pauline Central will have been completed. The next two elementary

schools in design and development are Indian Hills Elementary and Jay Shideler Elementary. Construction on those two buildings is expected to begin in early 2025.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

To address the significant need for early childhood education programs in the district, every elementary school building is being expanded to include an early childhood center. This expansion will enable the district to increase its capacity from serving 200 three- and four-year-old students to nearly 500.

Research demonstrates the significant impact of high-quality early childhood programs on child development. These programs lay the foundation for essential skills such as reading, math, self-control, and relationship-building. By providing children with a supportive and enriching environment during their formative years, they are better equipped to succeed academically and socially as they progress through school and beyond. ★



Pauline Central Primary School

AUBURN ELEMENTARY

Day of Service



Auburn Elementary is a prime example of how schools can be the heart of a community. In many ways, the school serves as the hub of the city, a role they take very seriously. With purpose and intention, the school works to foster connections with the wider community through partnerships and service initiatives. Their outreach committee nurtures relationships with local businesses and organizations by assigning every grade level a partnership. Additionally, every spring, students in all grade levels participate in a cleanup project, which consists of picking up litter from streets, parks, and ditches around town. The school-wide initiative not only helps to beautify the community, but it also instills in the students a sense of pride and responsibility. It is one of many ways the school fosters a service-oriented bond with the community. ★

FARLEY ELEMENTARY

Careers on Wheels

Students at Farley Elementary enjoyed a fun and engaging “Careers on Wheels” event this spring as part of their career unit. Organized by school counselor Isabella Turrell and social worker Zuleika Reynoso, the event featured various stations for students to learn about different professions and the vehicles associated with them. Highlights included a fire truck, police cruiser, utility truck with a hydraulic boom, mobile dog grooming service, and the Bookmobile. The hands-on experience provided students with a unique opportunity to explore careers and view live demonstrations. Not only was it educational, but it sparked curiosity and enthusiasm from students about future career opportunities. ★

INDIAN HILLS ELEMENTARY

Career Day

Students at Indian Hills Elementary had the opportunity to explore various professions during their inaugural Career Day event in March. Held in the school's gymnasium, the event featured a vendor-style fair where students in grades 3-6 could engage with employers, ask insightful questions about their professions, and participate in interactive activities and demonstrations. The fair showcased a wide range of careers, from cosmetology and healthcare to engineering and the arts. Organized by social worker Angela Garlock, the event highlighted some of the diverse career options students could pursue. To prepare for Career Day, students also learned how to create resumes and practice for interviews. “The kids loved it and requested to have it again,” said Garlock. “I look forward to making it even bigger and better next year!” ★



JAY SHIDELER ELEMENTARY

Junior Achievement

The district has long benefited from its partnership with Junior Achievement, a nonprofit organization that uses volunteers to teach students about financial literacy, career readiness, and entrepreneurship. However, only one school can boast a volunteer descended from its namesake. Randy Shideler, grandson of Jay Shideler, has been teaching Junior Achievement classes at Jay Shideler Elementary School for the past three years. After a decades-long career in finance, Randy is now retired but finds joy teaching third-graders about economics and finance. He cherishes the legacy of his grandfather, who served as a board member in the district for 20 years. "He believed in serving the community and passed that responsibility on to us," said Shideler. "Volunteering at the school that bears his name is incredibly meaningful." This year, 26 of Jay Shideler's 28 classrooms participated in Junior Achievement, making it one of the schools with the highest participation in the county. ★

which include supplies, books, and materials, will be distributed with the goal of increasing knowledge of developmental milestones, sharing local resources that support basic family needs, and developing connections within the community. In addition to Parents as Teachers programming, the community room will provide space for other family outreach activities, such as food and nutrition classes and parenting classes. ★



PAULINE SOUTH

Topeka Sharefest

The grounds at Pauline South underwent a remarkable transformation this spring thanks to Topeka Sharefest, an annual event dedicated to bringing volunteers together to enhance public spaces throughout the community. Embracing its "Do More Together" philosophy, the Sharefest event saw participation from dozens of volunteers, including a dedicated team from Balanced Lawn Care. Current and former students, staff, and parents also contributed. Together they weeded, mulched, trimmed, planted, and painted. "This is our fourth year participating in Sharefest," said Balanced Lawn Care co-owners Tyler Robinson and Tyler Strunk. "We continue to volunteer because we enjoy being part of something bigger than ourselves." ★



PAULINE CENTRAL

Parents as Teachers

Auburn-Washburn has long partnered with Parents as Teachers, a program that works with families to strengthen the parent-child relationship, promote early childhood development, and improve school readiness. This upcoming fall, the newly constructed Parents as Teachers community room will open at Pauline Central, extending services to even more families in the area. The program, which is offered free of charge, provides personalized family visits with trained family support specialists to those in the district with children three years of age and younger. Monthly learning kits,

WANAMAKER ELEMENTARY

Rolling Hills Retirement Community

Student Council representatives at Wanamaker Elementary are developing intergenerational relationships with residents at Rolling Hills Retirement Community. This past school year, they participated in semi-annual visits, which included a festive holiday event in December and an Earth Day celebration in April. In addition to singing carols and potting plants, the students spent time interacting with the residents



by playing cards and board games, working on coloring sheets, exploring picture books, and reading. "It's been a wonderful partnership that we hope continues," said school counselor Larissa Slimmer. "I think we get as much out of our visits as the residents do – maybe even

more!" Wanamaker's Student Council is made up of representatives in grades 4-6. Two students from each classroom are chosen as representatives and two more are chosen as alternates. ★

WASHBURN RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

Dialogue Coffee House

Founded in 2019 by Washburn Rural High School alumna Caitlyn Halsey, Dialogue Coffee House's unique approach to business has won over hearts across Topeka. Operating under the belief that, "We all long to feel valued and show our talents to the world," the coffee house employs adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, providing them with meaningful job opportunities and satisfying human connections. Halsey, who attended Auburn-Washburn schools for the entirety of her K-12 career, has garnered a base of support from staff members across the district who recall her as being a student who was kind, inspirational, and hard-working. Those traits were on full display this past spring as she and store manager Chelsea Huston collaborated with middle school

students on a weekly order system, with staff placing orders through an online form and students managing all deliveries and transactions. "We loved collaborating with the middle school staff to assist students with gaining job training experience," said Halsey. "We look forward to the many ways we can continue building up our community together." ★



WASHBURN RURAL HIGH SCHOOL

Midwest Homes

For several years now, high school students have collaborated with external partners to develop job-ready skills in residential construction science. Through the Architecture and Construction career pathway – one of 15 offered through the high school's Career Technical Education (CTE) program, students partner with Midwest Homes to obtain hands-on carpentry experience. As part of the partnership, Midwest Homes provides the design plans and specifications, purchases all building materials, and secures permits, inspections, and approvals. In return, students complete all of the framing on a modular home that is built on school property. The partnership offers a win-win scenario. Students gain real-world construction experience while partnering with a local company that promotes affordable home ownership. ★



DISTINGUISHED STAFF AWARDS

Congratulations to the 2024 Auburn-Washburn Distinguished Staff Award recipients. These individuals were nominated by colleagues and selected by a 17-person, district-wide committee. The Teachers of the Year recipients and the District Master Teacher will go on to represent Auburn-Washburn in state-level award programs.



Kyle Nelson
Indian Hills Grade 6
Elementary Teacher of the Year



Kristin Taylor
WRMS Special Education
Secondary Teacher of the Year



Emma Tichenor
Indian Hills Grade 3
District
Master Teacher



Meghan Baranski
WRMS Library Media Specialist
Distinguished Certified
Support Staff



Marisa Dexter
Early Childhood Paraprofessional
Distinguished Classified
Support Staff



Russ D'Andrea
District Transportation
Distinguished Operations
Support Staff

2023-2024 RETIREES

- **Russ Barnell**, WRMS Teacher
- **Mark Butler**, District Computer Technician
- **Barbara Casto**, District Bus Driver
- **Charles Chapman**, Jay Shideler Custodian
- **Georgina Engler**, WRMS Food Service
- **Pam Grieves**, District Food Service Secretary
- **Rick Grose**, WRHS Teacher
- **Mimi Hinshaw**, District Physical Therapist
- **Susan Holmes**, WRMS Counselor
- **Kim Jones**, Tallgrass School Nurse
- **Jeanette Keiser**, Wanamaker Paraprofessional
- **JoAnn Kibbee**, Auburn Teacher
- **Jimmy Knowland**, Pauline South Head Custodian
- **Rita Manker**, Auburn Teacher
- **Janet Marney**, Farley Lunch Aide
- **Terry Marney**, District Bus Driver
- **Barb Moody**, Indian Hills Teacher
- **Lisa Perkuhn**, Indian Hills Paraprofessional
- **Mary Pridey**, District Early Childhood Education Supervisor
- **Susan Ross**, Pauline South Counselor
- **Jim Wagner**, WRHS Teacher
- **Deb Withey**, WRMS Teacher

YEARS OF SERVICE

50 Years of Service

- **Linda Pfannenstiel**, District Bus Driver

35 Years of Service

- **Tammie Jackson**, Auburn Food Service Manager
- **Teresa LaFontaine**, District Bus Driver & Paraprofessional

30 Years of Service

- **Kristine Bruce**, WRMS Teacher
- **Jenni Howard**, Gifted Teacher
- **Kim Jones**, Tallgrass School Nurse
- **Tammy Sanders**, Auburn Elementary Teacher

25 Years of Service

- **Eugina Baer-Witt**, WRHS Teacher
- **Jana Dible**, WRHS Teacher
- **Dean Gerlach**, WRHS Teacher
- **Kyle Reed**, WRHS Associate Principal
- **Bob Stremel**, District Computer Technician

2024-2025 ONLINE REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

Registration and enrollment is a two-part process. Families must complete both steps—registration and enrollment—in order to attend school in the Auburn-Washburn district. The registration process varies slightly depending on your circumstances. Please see below for additional information.

Returning Families: You are considered a returning family if you had at least one student enrolled in grades K-12 during the 2023-2024 school year. If you are a returning family, you may log in to your Campus Portal account (campus.usd437.net) at any time to start or continue your registration.

New Families: You are considered a new family if you reside in the Auburn-Washburn district and did not have a student enrolled in grades K-12 during the 2023-2024 school year. You may start the registration process by following the instructions online at www.usd437.net/registration/new.

WASHBURN RURAL HIGH SCHOOL

Students attending Washburn Rural High School may need to take additional steps prior to the start of school, including purchasing a parking permit, obtaining a photo for their campus identification card, and purchasing a yearbook, if desired. Students may also need to meet with their counselor to make changes to their fall semester schedule. Washburn Rural High School will communicate directly with parents/guardians about steps that may need to be taken prior to the start of school.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Auburn-Washburn offers a limited number of early childhood slots for children 3-5 years old who meet specific criteria. More information is available at www.usd437.net. You may complete online registration to start the process of applying or to express interest in a screening. Questions may be directed to (785) 339-4675 or huberlor@usd437.net.

FEES

Fees may be paid online through your Campus Portal account or directly to your student's school.

QUESTIONS

If you have questions or need assistance with online registration, please call the OLR hotline during business hours at (785) 339-4955. ★

KEY FALL SEMESTER DATES

Aug. 13	School begins (Grades 1-7, 9 & new 10-12)
Aug. 14	School begins (Grades 8 & 10-12)
Aug. 15	School begins (Preschool & Kindergarten)
Sept. 2	No school
Sept. 30	No school
Oct. 11	No school
Oct. 17-18	No school
Nov. 25-29	No school
Dec. 23-31	No school

The entire 2024-2025 student calendar is available online at www.usd437.net/calendars.