



ADVOCATE

The newsletter of the Owen J. Roberts School Dis-



Welcome Back: An Exciting New School Year Begins for OJR Teachers

This August, Owen J. Roberts School District welcomed back more than 450 teachers to a brand new school year filled with exciting new opportunities and experiences for staff and students alike. As with many school districts, OJR's staff ranges in experience from first-year teachers to veteran educators with more than 30 years of classroom experience. While diverse, the district's teachers all share an enthusiasm for the new school year and a focus on providing students with a quality education.

For OJR High School English teacher Cole Stoecker, there is a sense of pride and motivation that comes from the opportunity to bring literature to life for students and to introduce them to works they might not have read otherwise.

"I want my students to feel comfortable and confident in their reading and communication skills," Stoecker said. "As the school year continues, my goal is to have students seek out new and harder text as they develop their writing skills and gain the skills necessary to write at a higher level – including as professionals."



While Stoecker admits to initially being a little intimidated by OJR's reputation within the community for quality education, he is thankful

for the extensive support he's received from his fellow teachers and the administration at the high school. Stoecker feels the guidance he's received has made him a better teacher and is reflected in the positive and productive relationships he's been able to foster with colleagues and students in his classroom.

"As long as a student is open to learning, I will give them everything I have to develop their reading and writing skills," Stoecker said. "I want my students and their families to know that my goal for this school year is to help students make continual progress and possess the ability to look back at the end of the school year and feel a sense of accomplishment with their progress."

Just down the hall from Cole Stoecker is Joseph Gallagher, a 30-year veteran English teacher at OJR High School. Not one to rest on his past accomplishments, Gallagher continues to push himself to evolve as an educator and utilize the latest tools available to him in the classroom.

"When I first started as a substitute teacher with OJR, we were using ditto sheets with students," Gallagher recalled. "But my focus now is working to incorporate technology into my lessons and how I keep students engaged in the content. Upwards of 90% of our class content is shared electronically, and I love to see the different approaches used by students to connect with what they've learned and present their ideas on a topic."

As part of his approach to education, Gallagher strives to create an environment that channels student energy and finds avenues for them to express their talent and ideas. For example, rather than simply reading a poem, he has students

recite a poem from memory, study its meaning and then create decorations to represent their interpretation of the piece. For Gallagher, it's all part of teaching students in a manner that feels authentic to him as an educator.

"One of the best pieces of advice I can give to younger teachers is to remember the age of your audience and be yourself," he notes. "Your lessons should come across naturally and be true to your personality; otherwise students will see through what you're trying to present. While teaching can sometimes feel overwhelming for young professionals, there's a certain magic, and reward, that comes with gaining a few years of experience and finding your voice as a teacher."



Meanwhile over at East Vincent Elementary, the school's first grade team is frequently cited by the school's principal, Dr. Edward Smith, as a prime example of the importance of collaboration and time management mastery. The three-member team includes fourth year teacher Mary Clare Culloty, 16 year veteran Mary Hoff, and Joanna Burns.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

OJRMS Recognized for Art Program; Home to Published Authors

Our school was recently recognized by the Pennsylvania Art Education Association as an Outstanding Visual Art Community in honor of the school's commitment to visual arts education opportunities for all students PK-12. Schools and districts receiving this endorsement demonstrate the importance of their visual arts programs with rigorous and inclusive programs, highly accessible programs for all students, and highly visible programs.

Did you know that we have two teachers in our building who are published authors? Both Mrs. Weber (7th grade - Blue Team ELA) and Mr. Armstrong (Building super-sub) have written books. Our library is presently promoting their works. Just a couple of the many talented staff members in our building.



North Coventry Welcomes New School Counselor; Celebrate Kindness

Alexis "Lexie" McClatchy is the new school counselor at NC replacing Sue Grashof who retired at the end of last year. Lexie is a Bryn Mawr native, an avid Philadelphia sports and Villanova Basketball fan. She is a recent Villanova graduate and worked as a long-term substitute in Ridley School District during last school year. In her free time, she loves spending time with her family, trying new restaurants, and most importantly: she loves working with kids! When asked why she got into the education field, she responded, "I wanted to become a school counselor to support kids in times they need it most and help them recognize the potential and strength they possess."

We are thrilled Lexie has joined the North Coventry Elementary family!

The third Wednesday in October is Unity Day. On October 18th, North Coventry staff and students wore orange as a way to symbolize this day of kindness, inclusion and acceptance. These three

tenets are paramount in helping to stop bullying. Teachers took this opportunity to speak with students about anti-bullying and how to speak up and stand up for anyone who is being bullied.



East Coventry Learns About Teamwork; Focuses on Literacy

"Our team needs YOU!"

This chant could be heard loud and proud from the East Coventry gym on Wednesday, October 4, 2023. The East Coventry students and staff launched their school-wide positive behavior system (PBIS) during an all school assembly. The overarching theme was to remind the school community of the power of working in teams as we make good choices throughout the year.

Special visitors from the Owen J. Roberts High School girls and boys varsity basketball teams joined the launch to help demonstrate teamwork to our students. Our staff joined in the fun creating skits to show our school wide expectations of PAWS. PAWS represents: Practice responsibility, Act respectfully, Work together, and Safety matters.

You could feel the excitement as the students clapped, chanted, and danced their way into the power of teamwork and the start of a successful school year in true EC style.

During the summer months, EC purchased a set of leveled readers for teachers to use as part of their literacy instruction. A special "thanks" to our amazing PTO who funded the purchase! We are so fortunate to have such a supportive PTO who provided the \$13,000 that helped offset the majority of the cost for the sets of readers. A special shoutout to the EC families who participated in the various fundraisers allowing the PTO to support us! Your efforts directly support the education for your students.



High School Honors Law Enforcement; Students Recognized

On Friday October 6, we honored local and State Police at the football game in recognition of their work keeping our community safe in September. We appreciate their leadership, and thank them for being our heroes. You can watch highlights of the salute on the district's YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/Ox1zCk1Ejjo?feature=shared>

On Monday, October 23, 2023 the National Merit Semifinalist and Commended Students were recognized at the School Board Meeting. Commended students are among the top 2% to 4% of test takers in the state, while semifinalist students represent the top 1% to 2% of test takers in the state. Congratulations to our recognized students on this accomplishment!

Semifinalist Students - Owen Butler, Samantha Koury, Julia Robinson

Commended Students - Hamsa Bandi, Aidan Bonner, Grace Dales, Veer Kakar, Vedika Nair, Aman Pothakamury, Olivia Savochka, Brian Serfass, Saikousil Tirumalasetty, Erik Zarkoski

You can learn more about our [Semifinalist students](#) and our [Commended students](#) using these links.



West Vincent Raises \$30k; Celebrates Police

This October, West Vincent Elementary School students and staff joined together for the annual West Vincent Elementary PTA Wildcat Walk-A-Thon. Thanks to the incredible generosity of the community, the event raised more than \$30k for enhanced learning experiences for students! Be sure to check out video highlights on our YouTube channel - https://youtu.be/8HCz35_les4?feature=shared

Students at West Vincent Elementary School celebrated their local police officers with handmade cards, asked officers questions, and had the chance to celebrate the community's real-life superheroes. Video highlights are available at <https://youtu.be/ASXHTkpniz4?feature=shared>



East Vincent Welcomes Firefighters

Each month, East Vincent focuses on a character trait or skill for staff and students to learn about. Empathy was the chosen quality of a learner for September. Morning announcements, classroom meetings, and other activities defined and celebrated the idea of Empathy in our school. At the end of the month, homeroom teachers from each grade level nominate a student who has embodied this trait throughout their interactions with others. The photo shows the smiling faces of those students who earned this honor from each grade level K-6.

Our Wildcats in kindergarten and 2nd grade learned about fire safety and the heroic work of firefighters thanks to our brave friends at Ridge Fire Company! Thank you for everything you do for our community!



French Creek Student Dines with the Superintendent

In October, French Creek students and staff gathered to show heartfelt appreciation for our PA State Troopers, law enforcement agencies near and far, and local first responders. A video of our celebration can also be found on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/2Rq-HV9d1Vw?feature=shared>

Wildcat Robbie Nyemscek won the Coventry Little League's "One hour with the Superintendent" raffle last season. Today, Dr. Stout treated him, his sister Allie and their friends Madison Nesley and Cooper Schlegel to lunch with some yummy pizza! Congrats Robbie and thanks for sharing your pizza with the superintendent (it's his favorite)!

Mrs. Jones's class celebrated Pajama Day as part of their efforts in the Raise Craze fundraiser. They have filled their entire bingo board and are so excited!



Wildcats Settle-In and Find Their Strides at OJR High School

The start of every school year is filled with anticipation, and often some nervousness as students prepare for unfamiliar subjects with a new slate of teachers and classmates. While freshmen adjust to life as high school students, seniors work hard to stay focused on their final year as OJR students before they graduate. Wildcats Ayana Huff and Nori Cass are at very different stages of their high school careers. However, as both settle into their surroundings they share an excitement about their experiences thus far, in addition to an optimistic view of what's still to come.

Ayana Huff, Grade 9

"My sister is a junior, and when I asked her before school started if she had any advice for me as an incoming freshman, all she had to say was "good luck." Needless to say, I was petrified walking in on my first day.

"I had no clue where I was going, everybody in the halls seemed like adults, and all of my teachers on that first day warned us about how hard their classes would be. By lunchtime, I was convinced that I couldn't do it. That I wasn't ready, and that I wouldn't even be able to make it a month. By the end of the day, I was convinced I wouldn't even make it a week. I went home, utterly exhausted, and cried, absolutely dreading the next day.

"But like it always does, the morning came. I wandered, but it was a little easier to guess where to go. Everybody didn't seem as tall. My teachers started their lessons, but they all also started their classes by saying, "Don't be afraid to ask questions. Don't be afraid to reach out." And things got easier. I did make it through that first week. Then that first month.

"I no longer have to pay attention to where I'm walking in the halls. I've made friends with some of the upperclassmen I was so terrified of. Yes, school work is hard, but all of your teachers sincerely are there for you and will help you if you ask, I promise. I have no doubts it will only get harder as I go, but I'm not scared like I was. High school isn't some terrible beast I need to fight on my own."



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CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

...Exciting New School Year (Continued from Page 1)

For Culloty, this school year marks a crucial point in her career in which she believes she has an ideal balance of experience, in combination with relationships she's cultivated with students, families and her team.

"While understanding subject curriculum is vital; the biggest factor in fostering success in the classroom comes down to building strong, trusting relationships with my students and their families, as well as with my teammates and colleagues," Culloty said. "My teammates are amazing resources and I am completely comfortable asking for tips and strategies to help me grow as teacher. Likewise, I've come to appreciate and understand how my relationships with my students extend beyond the school day, or even the school year, and how my influence shapes them as learner."

Her more experienced colleague, Mary Hoff, shares a similar takeaway.

"I've reached the point in my career where my former students, who are now in middle school or high school, will share their memories of our time together," Hoff said. "It can be easy to forget how much of a factor we are in the daily lives of our students. We not only influence their entire school day, we also influence how they view school and how they approach their education once they leave our classroom."

Bringing together their shared and individual experiences, the first grade teachers at East Vincent stress the importance of ongoing collaboration and time management in their team's success. Together they exchange strategies and ideas, create a learning environment where everyone is comfortable asking questions, and are consistently evaluating which strategies and tactics work and which ones need adjustments.

"Creating a culture of respect is the key to everything we do as a team," Hoff notes. "Trust accelerates our planning and timing, and together we are able to create a safe learning environment that balances fresh ideas with proven approaches to student learning."

From kindergarten through grade 12, and from their first year of teaching to year 30 and beyond, OJR's teachers bring a wealth of knowledge, creativity and collaboration to their classrooms. Their commitment to excellence, and diverse experiences, have helped make Owen J. Roberts not only one of the best school districts in Pennsylvania, but also a truly special place for students to learn and grow.



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Or

Email - Community@ojrsd.net

...Wildcats Settle-In (Continued from Page 4)

Nori Cass Grade 12

"Everything I have done since middle school is finally paying off. While I don't have don't have 'Senioritis', I do feel like I have an incentive to relax a little. I've been living life by each day since June, and I haven't been this happy in a long time.

"I enjoy each class, I make plans with my friends for the weekends, and sometimes I even stay up too late on school nights to watch the stars from my bedroom window. That way, when the time finally comes for me to walk through these halls for the last time, I'm satisfied with what I did. I can walk out from these walls and know that I lived, I learned, I loved, and I was loved back.

"All the friends I made between COVID and now are gearing up for final goodbyes and getting along with their own lives. It's hopeful, it's melancholic, it's everything you'd hope and dream for in a victory 18 years in the making.

"If I were to graduate now, I'd be content with that, but as long as I'm walking the line between high school and college, why not walk with a song in my step?

If my steps have a song, then let my voice carry a tune: Here comes the sun, am I falling up?"



Superintendent's Notebook

It might be an understatement to say we've had an exciting start to the 2023-2024 school year. And yet, with Thanksgiving just a few weeks away, I cannot help but feel fortunate to work alongside so many of you in our wonderful community. We have a great many things for which we can be thankful.

First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude and appreciation for our men and women in law enforcement. Thank you for keeping our community safe and for serving as heroes for our Wildcat community.

To everyone who has served in the military on behalf of our great nation, thank you for your service. We hope you were able to join us for our special Veterans Day celebrations across the district.

To our teachers, administrators and staff, thank you for making OJR a special place to live and work. Every day, at every school, you're making a profound difference in the lives of students and giving them the skills and knowledge they need to pursue their dreams. It's a privilege to work alongside all of you.

To our students and their families, thank you for your resiliency, your dedication and your unwavering support for our school district. From academics and athletics, to the performing arts, you continue to make us proud to be Owen J. All the Way! I look forward to all of the milestones and memories we'll celebrate together throughout this school year.

Finally, I want to thank our residents for your continued partnership in K-12 public education. We strive every day to serve as the best representation of the communities we serve and to earn your trust as responsible stewards of the community's greatest resource – its children.

Over the last few weeks, we've had a number of big announcements that we've shared with the community and I just want to provide a quick summary of highlights for our readers.

Nothing is more important to us than the safety of our students. On October 16, 2023, OJR began a partnership with local law enforcement and BusPatrol to launch a new School Bus Safety Program. Our safety initiative is part of Pennsylvania's Operation Safe Stop to help support student safety while traveling to and from school. Our entire fleet of OJR school buses are now outfitted with automated enforcement technology to detect the license plates of vehicles that fail to stop for school buses while the stop sign is out and red lights are engaged. As always, your support for this initiative is appreciated and vital to keeping our children safe.

Next, during a recent School Board Working session, we shared the 2023 Student Assessment data with the Board. Highlights include:

Increased student enrollment for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses at the high school.

Increased mathematics scores for both 7th and 8th grade students on the PSSA at the middle school.

Every elementary grade level had increased PSSA mathematics achievement from the previous year.

If you're interested in reviewing the Assessment Presentation and the Assessment Data shared at the meeting, please access the "Agendas and Presentation" link under the School Board tab of our website, or visit <http://go.boarddocs.com/pa/ojrsd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=CVZP7X61922C>.

Finally, I want to share that district leadership presented our updated goals for the 2023-2024 school year to the OJR Board of School Directors. These goals will guide all of our strategies and efforts throughout the school year and incorporate three primary areas: Student Wellbeing, Student Success and Infrastructure Excellence.

Student Success will focus on ensuring that all students are challenged and engaged, while providing multiple pathways for student success by broadening opportunities, building support systems and eliminating barriers. As part of this focus area, our district will work to eliminate opportunity gaps and to ensure all students are active participants in the community.

Student Wellbeing will strive to create an environment that fosters the growth and nurturing of all students' physical, mental, and social-emotional growth in healthy, safe and supportive learning environments.

And last, but certainly not least, as part of Infrastructure Excellence we will evaluate, discuss and look to finalize the ten year Master Facilities Plan and proposed Capital Financing Plan.

For more information about our goals, and the primary focus areas we've identified as a school district, please visit <https://www.ojrsd.com/domain/1918>.

In the coming weeks and months I encourage you to visit our website and social media platforms regularly for all the latest news from Owen J. Roberts School District, including updates on our goals and other initiatives.

From our schools to your home, please enjoy a wonderful fall season and have a very Happy Thanksgiving.

Sincerely,

Dr. Will Stout
Superintendent



Owen J. Roberts School District

Inspiring Each Student for Success Today and Greatness Tomorrow

Fall 2023 Edition

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