



ADVOCATE

The newsletter of the Owen J. Roberts School District



Winter 2023-2024

OJR to Implement Later School Start Times; Full-Day Kindergarten

Over the past few years, the Owen J. Roberts School District has pursued the opportunity to re-evaluate the needs of students, explore best practices that support classroom-learning environments, and develop strategies that foster greater academic achievement from students. We are excited to share with you two game-changing administrative recommendations recently approved by the Board of School Directors this past January,

After careful consideration, the School Board has approved beginning the transition to push back school start times and dismissals in Owen J. Roberts, beginning with the 2024-2025 school year (next year).

In addition, the School Board approved that the administration proceed with the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten beginning with the 2025-2026 school year (two school years from now).

As part of the proposal to change school start times, instruction at the high school and middle school will be pushed back 30 minutes, beginning at 8 a.m. and ending at 2:45 p.m. In addition, we will push back instruction at our elementary schools by 20 minutes, with classes beginning at 8:50 a.m. and dismissing at 3:30 p.m.

The schedule change also means that elementary schools will hold their morning half-day kindergarten programs from 8:50 a.m. until 11:35 a.m., while afternoon kindergarten programs will run from 12:35 p.m. until 3:30 p.m.

The decision to move forward with changes to OJR's school start times is based, in-part, on the district's ability to hire school bus drivers to serve the transportation needs of our community.

Previously, OJR faced a severe shortage of bus drivers and shared that any proposed school start time change would require additional drivers. However, the district's administration previously shared with the community their intention to continue pursuing a path toward later school start times for students while prioritizing efforts to address OJR's bus driver shortages.

In November 2023, [the Transportation Department provided an update on school bus driver staffing during the Working Session of the Board of School Directors](#). During the meeting, it was announced that as a result of recruitment efforts, OJR is now fully-staffed with 90 buses with full-time drivers, 3 full-time office staff, and 1 full-time lot mechanic. In addition, the budget allowed for 4 additional buses, which were added this past January. The addition of 4 buses to OJR's service fleet will help to reduce ride times for students, help to reduce load counts on our buses, and enable buses to arrive earlier to the Elementary School Line-Up - making for a smoother, quicker dismissal.

Regarding the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten in our schools, the community has been clear in its desire to see Owen J. Roberts pursue this course of action and to have schools provide educational opportunities that align with those already being offered in neighboring school districts in Chester County and the surrounding region.

After assessing the classroom capacities and facility capabilities throughout the school district, the administration is confident it can effectively implement Full-Day Kindergarten in a timely and efficient manner, and with minor disruptions to students' learning environments.

In the coming months, OJR will share additional information about these changes, particularly regarding school start times, and provide plenty of time for families to make adjustments to their schedule ahead of the start of the school year in late-August. In the meantime, please visit our [School Start Time](#) portal, available on the OJR website, and consider reading the [Question & Answer](#) document that was compiled based on the feedback received from parents, teachers, students and the community.

The administration and school board of OJR thank the community for its patience, feedback and participation in this important process - particularly the students, parents, staff, and community members who served on the school start time committee and assisted in this valuable work. Stay tuned for more information!

Learn More

- Research
- History
- Presentations
- Resources

[Click Here to Visit the School Start Times Web Portal](#)

OJRMS Student Wins Spelling Bee; Student-Artists Recognized

Charan Garimella, represented Owen J. Roberts at the Chester County Spelling Bee. Out of 42 schools, Charan Garimella came away with the victory and will be representing Owen J. Roberts Middle School in Washington, D.C. at the National Spelling Bee. That's right! He won the whole contest and will be on his way to the nation's capital. Congratulations on this huge accomplishment, Charan! We are very proud of you!

Congratulations to the following Owen J. Roberts Middle School Wildcats for having their artwork selected for the PAEA Youth Art Month Exhibit: Charlotte Gerber, Grade 7; Lukas Foster, Grade 8; Emma Morrow, Grade 8; Aditi Patil, Grade 8; Jessie Payne, Grade 7; Austin Biggar, Grade 8; Katherine Zhuang, Grade 7; and Sadie Fisher, Grade 8. The exhibit will be online March 1-31, 2024. Awarded works will be displayed in the PA State Capitol in March 2024.



North Coventry Lego Club at it Again; Students Learn About Music

Twenty students who earned Wally Wildcats tickets were randomly chosen from the board to earn a bonus experience! Today, they received their admission tickets to play football bingo! They snacked on Philly soft pretzels while playing and had lots of exciting fun.



Lego Club is at it again! This time they needed to make a working catapult. Some of our creations managed to shoot a Lego brick across the library!

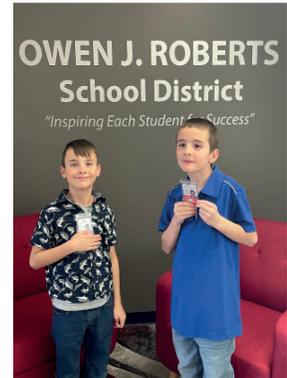


Students in Mrs. Heckler's second-grade class learned about the four instrument families and participated in an "instrument run" activity to sort instruments into their correct families. Over a span of several weeks, students enjoyed the opportunity to see and listen to orchestra instruments in music class and were able to play some of the instruments!



East Coventry Students Excel Academically & Musically

Dr. Oswald enjoyed teaming with a pair of student helpers as part of "Principals of the Day" this past February.



Congratulations to grade 4 student Misbah for representing EC at this past week's countywide spelling bee. Misbah and many other students from across the county competed in the bee from public and private schools. Chester County Intermediate Unit sponsors the annual event. A special "thanks" to grade 4 teacher Mrs. Palumbo for organizing our local competition.

A special shout-out to our 6th grade students who participated in the PEMA Band Fest at West Chester East HS. This distinguished group included students from across the county. Congratulations!



High School Celebrates Milestones, Community Service!

This February, 71 students were inducted into the National English Honor Society (NEHS) during a ceremony in the LGI. NEHS members must demonstrate excellence and passion for the English Language Arts. Students who join the NEHS engage in activities and endeavors that support the skills related to the discipline, which foster literacy and promote strong character and fellowship in their larger community.

The NJROTC held their annual Area 3 Managers Inspection and Pass-in-Review on February 8. It was a phenomenal event to showcase the discipline, dedication, and hard work these young men and women exhibit daily. A brief clip of highlights from the Pass-in-Review ceremony is [accessible here](#).

Wildcats Julian Ladd (cello), Katie Post (French horn), and Matthew Mullholland (French horn) represented OJRHS at the prestigious PMEA District Orchestra Festival. These students auditioned against many other musicians from surrounding counties and were selected to participate in this festival.

The Black Student Union (BSU) sponsored a donation campaign from December until MLK Jr. Day in January aimed at supporting youth in the foster care system. Thank you to everyone in the Wildcat community for your donations and for making an impact in the community! It is greatly appreciated! [Learn more here](#).

Congratulations to our Girls' Swim Team on winning the PACs this week! Their victory marks the the 8th year in a row the team went undefeated!

The Mock Trial Team had a strong performance in the District Mock Trial Competition, and did a tremendous job presenting our community and our school.



West Vincent Students Collect Supplies, Mark 100 Days

In January, the Student Council collected paper products and personal care products to benefit over 100 local families served by the Coventry Food Pantry! Items collected included bars of soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, tissues, toilet paper, deodorant and more!

In February, the PTA sponsored Sweetheart Dance was attended by hundreds of our Wildcats, along with their fathers, grandfathers, uncles and guardians.

We celebrated our 100th day of school in February by inviting our students to dress as if they were 100 years old! We loved the creativity (and cuteness) displayed by our students!

Dr. Detweiler provided an update about West Vincent's approach to the school year as part of the most recent Superintendent's Update, available on YouTube by [clicking here](#).



East Vincent's Weston Named OJR Employee of the Month

We are honored to announce Carole Weston as our February 2024 Employee of the Month! Carole is a Paraprofessional at East Vincent Elementary School and has worked in our district for over 10 years.

"It is difficult to find the words to describe how amazing Carole is. She is the most patient, caring, compassionate employee that I have ever worked with at OJR. Her positive attitude each and every day is infectious and her support in the classroom is outstanding. The way she works with kiddos in a small group is truly incredible. I cannot be more appreciative of all Carole does for the EV students, staff, and building. She is the most deserving person for this award!" - Amanda Schaefer

"Carole is the most kind, patient, caring, positive, and helpful person! She always has a smile on her face and is eager to help out in any way. She is so patient with the children and always so helpful. She is not afraid to jump right in and help. She is always prepared and goes above and beyond." - Amanda DiPasqua

[Watch her surprise announcement](#) on our YouTube channel.



French Creek Promotes Kindness; Celebrates an Hour of Code

This January, French Creek participated in The Great Kindness Challenge, a proactive and positive bullying prevention initiative that promotes improved school climate and increased student engagement. The Great Kindness Challenge is one week devoted to performing as many acts of kindness possible.

French Creek celebrated Hour of Code in December, a week where millions of students from all across the world participate in at least 1 hour of coding activities (and their teachers join in too) to demonstrate that everyone can learn to code. This year, the STEAM department prepared both plugged and unplugged activities for classes to enjoy.



Wildcat Wisdom - Catching-Up With Freshman Jeffrey Shalome

This year has been pretty wild! High School is totally different, and I'm starting to get the hang of it. When I first got here, I didn't know what kind of person I wanted to be. Should I do everything, or just focus on school and maybe join one club? I decided to go in the middle.

I joined DECA and the OJR Marching Unit, and I even ran for Student Government. I also chose to do honors classes and skipped the APs as a freshman. It was a bit tough at first because high school is way harder than middle school. It felt like there was more work, and things got way trickier. At the start of the year, I was super stressed with all the assignments, but as time went on, I figured things out.

Now, juggling all my activities and classes is easy. I can handle everything without worrying too much. Sometimes I mess up a little, but it's not as bad as I thought. It's like I found the sweet spot in balancing everything. I've moved on to States in DECA, and made great friends in the Marching Band, and being part of Student Government is cool too. The honors classes are challenging, but they're not overwhelming.

Looking back, I can see how much I've grown since the beginning of the year. Freshman year isn't a breeze, but it's not a disaster either. I've learned to manage my time better and prioritize things. The transition from middle school to high school was a bit rocky, but I'm doing way better now.

I'm excited about what's coming next. High school is turning out to be a pretty cool experience, and I'm eager to see how the rest of my freshman year unfolds!



For a Physical Copy of the Advocate
Call 610-469-5100
Or
Email - Community@ojrsd.net

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**Join the Owen J. Roberts
Alumni Mailing List**

Sign-Up at www.OJRSd.com

Kindergarten Registration Now Open

Beginning February 1, 2024, the Skyward online registration system is now available for families to begin the process of registering their child for kindergarten for the 2024-2025 school year.

All children who live within the Owen J. Roberts School District, and who will attain the age of five on or before September 1, 2024, are eligible to attend school for the 2024-25 school year.

We invite you to visit the [registration website](#) for the latest information about kindergarten registration and to register your child online. At the end of the online registration process, you will be prompted to make an appointment to complete the registration process at one of our schools on either March 6 or March 7, 2024.

If you have any questions, or if you require any assistance, please don't hesitate to call your child's school. OJR can't wait to have your child join us for the upcoming school year!



It's Easy to Sign-Up for Text Message Updates from OJR!

If you're interested in receiving text messages on important and time-sensitive topics from your school and the OJR School District, it's now even easier to opt-in!

All you have to do is text "Y" or "Yes" to our school's short code number at 67587. (Message and data rates may apply.)

Afterwards, you'll receive a confirmation text letting you know that you're now registered for School Messenger Notifications. (We value your time and our approach is to reserve the use of text messaging for select updates such as weather-related decisions, delays, cancellations, and other vital information.)

Please know that in order to receive text messages you must ensure your cellular contact information is correct. If you want to double check, or update your information, you will need to log-in to Skyward (or EC if you're an OJR employee) and verify the number on file.

Don't delay, sign-up today!

OWEN J. ROBERTS OPT-IN TEXTING

DIRECT UPDATES:

- BUS DELAYS
- SCHEDULE CHANGES
- WEATHER CLOSURES

Scan the QR Code for
More Information:



OJR STEELS Update- Winter Edition

The new Pennsylvania Science Standards were developed jointly to ensure consistency, coherence, and a cohesive K-12 integrated approach to science education in the Commonwealth.

Now, OJR teachers are in the process of restructuring instructional strategies to model a three-dimensional approach for learning science. This approach maximizes the connections between how students think, what students know, and ultimately what students do (products they will construct). The new standards label these components: Cross-Cutting Concepts (CCC), Disciplinary-Core-Ideas (DCI), and Science and Engineering Practices (SEP).

OJR's science instruction will involve fewer expectations for memorization based on facts, whole class lectures, posing questions with only one correct response, the use of worksheets, or pre-planned "cookbook" labs, and activities that result in a single outcome. Moving forward, students will experience more opportunities to engage in discussion, work collaboratively, conduct investigations, create solutions for problems/challenges, analyze data, as well as write and maintain a journal of observations as they learn about the world around them.

Our STEAM program is in its second year. As a component of STEELS, it fully complements the state's integrated approach to collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving. The program's premise is to deliver instruction based on engineering concepts, coding, and robotics.

We would like to thank the Chester County Economic Development Council for loaning the district 14 Quest Headsets to research the possibility of Virtual Reality opportunities. There is no cost to the district for these devices and our students will have an opportunity to create an experience unique environments and activities such as launching Rube Goldberg machines.

The next K-12 STEELS Task Force will meet on February 21, 2024. This group includes not only teachers from every grade level and school- it has members from the community, administration, technology education, learning support, and our nurses are also represented. It will be the focus of the next session to align topics of study for every grade level and subject area. Please feel free to email me at hlehmann@ojrsd.net with any questions about our STEELS or STEAM programs at Owen J. Roberts School District.

Superintendent's Notebook

As I write this, there's little doubt that we're right in the middle of the winter season! Not only are we coming back from our fourth weather-related Flexible Instructional Day (FID) of the school year, there's also an abundance of snow on the ground and plenty of chilly temperatures. However, while most people associate snow with a number of fun, seasonal activities (or chores), for superintendents snow typically means an early start to the work day and a great deal of planning.

Recognizing that not everyone is familiar with how we determine when to implement FIDs, I recently took a few minutes to walk our community through the process during my most recent [Superintendent Update](#) video. In addition to the overview of our procedures designed to address inclement weather, I hope you take a few minutes to watch the second half of the video in which Dr. Jeff Detweiler at West Vincent Elementary School shares the latest happenings at his school. Be sure to hit the subscribe button to stay up to date on the [latest happenings](#) in our school district!

Although we're only a few weeks into the start of 2024, it's been quite an eventful time for the Owen J. Roberts School District. The Board of School Directors recently approved two significant administrative recommendations we brought before them, and I'm incredibly excited about the future of our school district.

Starting in August, we will push back our school start times by 30 minutes in our secondary schools and 20 minutes in our elementary schools – with instruction at the high school and middle school taking place from 8 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. and elementary school instruction taking place from 8:50 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Like OJR, many school districts across the nation have begun adjusting their school start times to align with scientific research suggesting that teenage students, especially those in high school, require more sleep than existing school bell times have previously afforded them. As a result, these school districts have seen significant increases to subject matter retention and student academic performance, experienced improvements to student mental and physical health, and seen the positive benefits to student behavior and safety.

Based on numerous studies, extensive research, and my own personal experience as a parent and an administrator, I firmly believe that our students will experience the same benefits already enjoyed by their fellow students across the nation.

Prior to the School Board's decision, Owen J. Roberts conducted extensive research focused on school start times and student sleep health, as well as solicited multiple rounds of feedback on the subject from students, families, staff and the community. Beginning September 2022, the OJR School Start Time Planning Committee reviewed research and survey findings, discussed benefits and challenges, as well as looked at costs and other factors with the goal of developing a formal recommendation on school start times to present to the greater community.

OJR's research on the subject of school start times includes a wealth of sources from subject matter experts, sleep scientists, consortiums, public education entities and more. We've collected this information for families to review by visiting our School Start Time Web Portal at <https://www.ojrdsd.com/Page/10477>.

In addition to later school start times in August 2024, we're excited to announce the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK), starting the following year, in August 2025. We know this is something the community has requested in the past, and we want everyone to know that we hear you and understand that this is a priority for families.

Implementing FDK provides a number of benefits to our students, including the creation of a solid basis for future academic success (learning how to be a learner), a deeper dive into content, a slower pace, the ability for reteaching and enrichment, and exposure to a wider range of subjects. In addition, a Full-day program provides more opportunities for academic content and a structured environment, while enabling staff to support emotional learning and focus on social development to build peer connections.

After assessing the classroom capacities and facility capabilities throughout our school district, I am confident that we can effectively implement Full-Day Kindergarten in a timely and efficient manner for the start of the 2025-2026 school year (the school year after next).

I appreciate that these changes represent a departure from our established operations and want to acknowledge that our community has a variety of opinions and preferences about the preferred path forward for our students. I also recognize that arriving at a consensus opinion is not always possible for every initiative and important decision we make as an administration. However, my priority is, and remains, charting a path forward that keeps with the best interest of students – even if that path forward brings unique challenges we must work to overcome together.

I believe the implementation of the operational changes we've recently announced will create a better, long-term learning environment for students. There will likely be some hiccups along the way, and there's no doubt that these changes will require time to fully adjust. But for all of our time and effort, I have no doubt that we will be better able to educate our students.

In closing, I want to thank everyone once again for your patience, feedback and participation in this important process. I want to especially thank the students, parents, staff and community members who served on the school start time committee and assisted us in this valuable work. I also want to thank every member of our community who has taken the time to attend our listening sessions and town hall meetings, and everyone who has emailed me their thoughts and ideas on these crucial topics.

I look forward to your ongoing partnership and support of our students as we continue to enjoy an amazing school year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Will Stout
Superintendent



Owen J. Roberts School District

Inspiring Each Student for Success Today and Greatness Tomorrow

Winter 2023-2024 Edition

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