



ADVOCATE

The newsletter of the Owen J. Roberts School District



Spring/Summer 2024

Community at East Coventry: The Power of One Book; Many Memories

From the minute you walk through the front doors of East Coventry Elementary School, there's an unmistakable feeling of being welcomed and at home. The building, decorated in vibrant colors and the latest activities of students, exudes a warmth and friendliness that reflects a team that is both comfortable around visitors and also united by a shared sense of identity and purpose.

Visit during any given month of the school year and you'll find yourself treated to a student parade, a "Cupcake Wars" style staff activity, or even the school's principal dressed up in full costume supporting the school's "One Book" initiative.

However, what visitors to East Coventry might not realize is that the school's climate and culture is the carefully crafted result of one of Owen J. Roberts School District's best and most enduring partnerships between school principal Dr. Todd Oswald, instructional coach Adria Creswell and a team of amazing teachers who have completely dedicated themselves to creating the type of elementary school experience that every parent wants for their child.

Welcome Home

Upon introduction, the first thing you notice about Adria Creswell is the inherent warmth and care that she exudes. Cheerful and engaging, she personifies the type of teacher who students adore for years after they last set foot in her classroom. A veteran educator with 25 years of experience, including seven years as an instructional coach, Adria believes that in order for students and teachers to perform their best, they need to be in a place where they need to feel supported and empowered to try new things.

"When teachers grow, students grow and so we focus on building a sense of community and shared culture," Adria explains. "You create that environment by building it – complete with treasured moments, new memories and by fostering support systems that encourage continuous growth."

While Adria's role as an instructional coach primarily focuses on ensuring teacher instruction is happening at its best level, she wears many hats – including serving as a mentor, a sounding board, a voice of encouragement, and most of all, a trusted partner for teachers. It's a process that takes time, but delivers undeniable results.

"As a coach, you spend the better part of a year gaining trust via simple conversations that convey to your teammates that you genuinely care about their lives," Adria notes. "As you build a relationship, there comes with it an increased willingness to try new things. I'm the first person willing to try something out and let myself be vulnerable."

"But from that mind comes the "ah-ha" moment when teachers start to truly buy into the concept of looking at our shared experiences and determining if there are any components that they want to 'trash, treasure or find a nugget' within. Through this approach we can uplift our teachers, and ultimately the students they serve, utilizing the tools, resources and opportunities that inspire them to learn and grow."

Adria is quick to point out that East Coventry's shared culture starts at the administrative level, and credits the school's principal, Dr. Todd Oswald, for creating a sense of community.

With 23 years of experience as an educator, including 14 as East Coventry's principal, Dr. Oswald believes that learning and growth are best inspired by creating an environment that supports 'the whole person' in the classroom.

"While we believe in a rigorous education, we also believe that the learning and growth will come because we're creating a space for it," Dr. Oswald observes. "When someone steps foot inside East Coventry for the first time, we want them to feel our mission to be safe, heard and loved. Beyond that, we want them to feel like school is an exciting place and one they can't wait to visit."

One Book

A prime example of the type of activities utilized by East Coventry to build a sense of shared belonging, is the school's 'One Book' initiative.

Started in 2020 as a way to re-unite and promote togetherness while students and staff were utilizing virtual classrooms, One Book sees everyone at East Coventry reading the same story and participating in classroom lessons and activities that are fun, engaging and support student instruction.

The concept came from a conference that Adria attended in Pittsburgh. True to her mindset to trash, treasure or find a nugget in all ideas, Adria saw an immediate fit for East Coventry. However, what was initially proposed as a way to combat social isolation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, eventually evolved into a beloved annual event at the school.

Continued on page 5...

OJRMS Wildcats Perform & Compete; Beloved Teacher Retires

Congratulations to students Caylie Zakaev, Asha Datta and Adelaide Guthrie on their recent performance at PMEA 7/8 String Fest! They participated in a day filled with music making, where they learned challenging music and valuable ensemble skills alongside students from across Chester, Delaware and Philadelphia counties.



It is with mixed emotions that we congratulate Mr. Mark Hofer on his retirement from teaching and thank him for his years of commitment to our district, our building and our students. Mr. Hofer has been a staple in our building since he began his teaching career in 1998, teaching 8th grade science for all of those years. He has been a student council advisor and an outspoken advocate for our students, our building and middle-level education. Moreover, he is a valued friend and colleague. We thank Mr. Hofer for his years of service to our building and district!



Congratulations to our middle school, Odyssey of the Mind students. Our school's teams just completed the Pennsylvania State Finals competition in Swiftwater, Pennsylvania. Our teams excelled in all portions of the competition. The middle school had students from grade six through eighth grade competing in the contest. One of our four competing teams finished as PA State Champions, earning the right to move on in the competition and represent our school district in the World Finals competition to be held at Iowa State University.

North Coventry Visits Valley Forge; Learns About Nature

On May 9th, fifth graders traveled to Valley Forge to be able to learn more about all of the rich history that surrounds our area.



First graders had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity as Mrs. Smith kindly brought in some of her silk worms and cocoons. The students enjoyed observing the silk worms wiggle in their hands while comparing them to the caterpillars.

Our Wildcats competed against a dozen other Chester County schools at Hibernia County Park on April 24th. They earned an "excellent" designation in the categories of aquatics and outdoor safety.



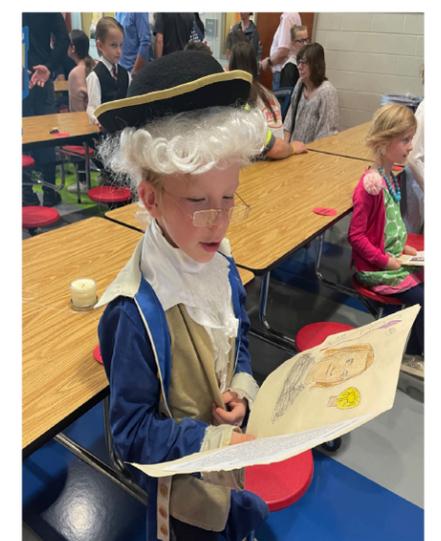
East Coventry Students Excel Academically & Musically

A little rain did not dampen the excitement of our 4th graders when they visited Elmwood Zoo this spring. The animals were out and ready to be seen!



Did you know that Milton Hershey and his wife had a ticket on the Titanic? So many famous and notable people in one place at once! Our second grade students researched and presented their information as part of the wax museum. Thanks to the 2nd grade teachers and families who helped their children prepare!

In early May, we celebrated kindergarten roundup and signing day as we welcomed the OJR class of 2037!



French Creek Celebrates Spring; Welcomes Mock Trial Team

The HS Mock Trial Team for visited our school to share information about democracy and justice as 3rd grade students prepare for their upcoming unit on government.

Our entire community enjoyed our Spring Choir Concert, featuting amazing performances from our Wildcat singers!

On May 10th, our French Creek K-Kids hosted a “K-Kids Cares About Animals & Reading” drive. Students collected supplies for the Animal Studies classroom at the high school, in addition to gently used or new books about animals that will be donated to local organizations that help kids.



Wildcat Wisdom - Catching-Up With Adrianna Everett



As a student, the best decision I have made for myself and my future was to attend Technical College High School (TCHS).

I admit that I struggle to pay attention in class and sit still for long periods of time. However, TCHS provides me with a hands-on learning experience that keeps me engaged through the entire class period. I enjoy that TCHS uses an adaptable teaching technique to accommodate everyone at all learning paces.

As a student in the Criminal Justice program, my teacher, Mr. Slattery, works with us to pass his knowledge and wisdom from his career field to sharpen our physical and mental abilities. My classes consist of many do-it-yourself activities that improve my critical thinking and problem-solving skills – with opportunities that include mock trials, DUI tests and even a chapter on writing tickets to those who park illegally in the school parking lot.

My normal class schedule includes attending Owen J. Roberts High School for half of the school day, and then riding a bus over to TCHS for my afternoon courses. Upon arrival at TCHS, everyone is greeted by staff with warm and welcoming smiles. I like that everyone knows each other by name, and I find it very refreshing be a part of a close-knit community. I enjoy long-lasting friendships and bonds with many other students who have similar goals and aspirations.

Although I was skeptical at first of the new experience, I am glad I made the choice to join TCHS. I could never imagine of all of the doors that have been opened through my academic program. Taking criminal justice classes at TCHS, along with my AP Psychology class at Owen J. Roberts, has pushed me to pursue my dream career in Forensic Psychology.

While attending TCHS has allowed me to impress my parents, I also know the younger version of myself would be in awe of everything I have been able to accomplish. TCHS has opened so many doors for me, and given me many pathways toward future opportunities. I can happily report that I've now been accepted to all my top college choices to pursue my career in forensic psychology! I can't wait to get started!



ATTENTION SENIORS

If you are:

Age 65 years of age or older
Age 50 years of age or older and a widow/widower
Age 18 years of age or older and permanently disabled

And

Your household income was \$45,000 or less during 2023
(Excluding 1/2 of all social security income)

You qualify for the Pennsylvania and OJR Property Tax/Rent Rebate Programs

The District will provide a 50% match of the refund received under the State program.
The rebate will be paid to qualifying participants after July 1, 2024.

Call your local legislator to apply for the program, or visit

www.revenue.pa.gov/IncentivesCreditsPrograms/PropertyTaxRentRebateProgram/Pages/default.aspx

Register Your Child for Kindergarten Today!

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.

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!



East Coventry (continued from page 1)...

"A year after the onset of the pandemic, there was still a great deal of uncertainty about how schools were navigating in-person instruction," Adria says. "But we still wanted everyone at our school to feel as if they were part of a shared community. We know books have the ability to bring us all together, and so we held our second annual One Book initiative, featuring 'The World According to Humphrey the Hamster'.

"This was the moment when our One Book initiative really started to grow and staff was eager to find ways to become involved," Adria says. "It was amazing to see staff thinking of new ideas, like bringing in a real hamster, and integrating their own traditions into our collective efforts."

With excitement shared across all grade levels, the 2021 One Book initiative included lining the hallways with hamster facts and projects, and culminated with East Coventry Wildcats forgoing through a blustery, windy day as everyone participated in a "hamster parade" outside the school building.

With One Book firmly established, Adria and the team at East Coventry were faced with the challenge of making each year bigger and better – and it's safe to say they've passed that challenge with flying colors.



For example, in 2022 the school selected an entry from the Fenway and Hattie series as their One Book selection. Noting that Fenway, the series' loveable K9 protagonist, has a love for ice cream and a keen interest in squirrels, the school enjoyed delicious treats generously donated by Handel's Homemade Ice Cream & Yogurt, while Dr. Oswald dressed up as a squirrel. The school was lined with student-created interpretations of the story, and Adria even brought puppies into the school as a pick-me-up for staff. She quickly credits Dr. Oswald for his unwavering support.

"Having the leader of our building be willing to go all-in on for our students and staff had a huge impact," Adria notes. "Writing, reading, science and social emotional learning are all big components of One Book. Academically, it's a wonderful way to bring vocabulary development

into our school. Students have a chance to see words come alive through our activities – terms like incubator, aquarium, terrarium and so much more!"

In the aftermath of the school's success with hamsters and puppies, Adria's follow-up One Book activities have ventured into the realm of tadpoles and baby chicks. But while she's always open to new ideas, and begins her activity planning more than a year in advance, Adria's arrived at one unshakeable resolution.

"No more frogs," she quips. "Everyone remembers the smell and I've made a promise that we'll never do that again. But just wait, we already have an exciting idea for 2025 that I can't wait to share with a surprise announcement!"

A Dynamic Team

"It all comes down to trust," says Dr. Todd Oswald. "Adria and I have worked together for a long enough time that she knows my comfort level and she does an amazing job. We complement each other well, with her being a creative, big-picture thinker in terms of traditions, activities and opportunities to enhance our climate and culture."

Likewise, Adria praises Dr. Oswald's ability to channel and organize ideas, and his talent for navigating the logistics behind multiple initiatives.

"Todd is very good at listening to big ideas," Adria shares. "As a coach and a principal, there's a strong bond you must have. The strength of our school reflects his leadership and vision."

However, both Adria and Dr. Oswald quickly note that the secret of the school's success belongs to its teachers and staff.

"You cannot do all of these activities unless you have other people who are willing to be involved," Dr. Oswald says. "That's a big piece of the culture we've fostered here – the staff leadership. Our team wants to get involved and be a part of something special."

For example, Dr. Oswald notes that the school's outdoor classroom day was discovered by a teacher and brought to East Coventry. The concept includes taking the entire school and creating an outdoor classroom. "Learning can occur anywhere; let's go outside and take a break from technology," shares Dr. Oswald.

Indeed, the staff at East Coventry have come with a variety of fun and engaging events that have

made the school a special place for staff to work and for students to learn.

The school's annual balloon parade derives from the book 'Balloons Over Broadway', while activities such as Crazy Reindeer Games, Candy Cane Olympics, Cupcake Wars and Robot Day have made a lasting impression with students and staff alike.

"Whenever I take 6th graders around for one last walk through the school before they graduate, they always come back to the moments we've shared," Adria notes. "All of these moments, created by our amazing team, are what makes an elementary school feel like an elementary school."

Other schools and school districts have taken notice of East Coventry's success. In recent years, Dr. Oswald and Adria have presented at conferences in Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C., and have also led presentations to the Chester County Immediate Unit. They've been approached by their peers in elevators and lobbies during numerous professional developments wanting to know more about the strategies and tactics being utilized in Owen J. Roberts School District. Today, they regularly hear from their counterparts across the state who want to bounce ideas around and brainstorm about replicating East Coventry's success.

For Dr. Oswald, Adria and the school's close-knit team, it all comes down to fostering the type of environment that every student deserves and every family wants for their child.

"When someone steps foot on the campus of East Coventry for the last time, we want them to take treasured memories with them," Adria concludes. "No matter where they go in life, we want everyone in our school community to feel like they were a part of something special."

And thanks to the team at East Coventry, students, families and staff can proudly say that they will always be part of the Wildcat Family.



Superintendent's Notebook

I can hardly believe another school year is close to completion here in Owen J. Roberts. It seems like only yesterday we were welcoming our Wildcat students and community back to class and gearing up for the many wonderful experiences that come from K-12 education.

And what an exciting year it's been!

After a fairly routine start to school, our community was quickly thrown into the national spotlight as our brave men and women in law enforcement worked tirelessly to recapture an escaped inmate from a Chester County jail. Despite all of the uncertainty we faced, for me it's the resolve of our students, staff and families that stands out the most. We rose to every challenge, showed grace under pressure and rallied together to show the nation what it means to be a resident of our community. I couldn't be prouder of the way everyone responded, and it reaffirmed my love for serving as your superintendent.

We also made positive changes in our school district that will benefit students for many years to come. Earlier this year, our Board of School Directors approved pushing back school start times by 30 minutes in our secondary schools and 20 minutes in our elementary schools – beginning with the 2024-2025 school year.

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.

In addition to later school start times our School Directors approved the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK), starting in August 2025. Our administrative recommendation, and subsequent Board approval comes as a direct result of the feedback we received from our community. We're excited to offer this expanded opportunity to all our families and look forward to sharing additional information in the coming months.

Over the course of this school year, we've remained focused on the District Goals we unveiled last fall. These goals have served to guide all of our strategies and efforts throughout the school year, particularly in regards to Student Wellbeing, Student Success and Infrastructure Excellence. As we plan for the 2024-2025 school year and beyond, we will continue to ensure all of our strategies and initiatives align with these three vital focus areas. This will be especially important as we begin to have discussions about our 10-year master facilities plan and take account of infrastructure capacities and the ongoing resources needed to support our students and staff.

I also want to thank our community and staff for their ongoing feedback throughout the school year. Since last fall, we've hosted two town hall meetings, 10 listening sessions and multiple community-focused events designed to facilitate discussions about the topics that impact our schools and our students. Your constructive feedback and suggestions have helped guide our recommendations and have been instrumental in our leadership approach. I look forward to continuing our discussions and offering our community additional opportunities to connect again next school.

Finally, I want to congratulate our graduating class of 2024, and their families, for all of their hard work. Our Wildcats have faced some unique challenges in recent years, but I'm amazed by the resiliency and determination they've shown. It's truly one of my greatest honors to join you at your graduation ceremony and see you embark on the next chapter in your life. I'd like to express a heartfelt thank you to our Wildcat families for entrusting us with your children and for your ongoing partnership in their education. And certainly I'd be remiss if I didn't express my deepest appreciation to our Wildcat team, including teachers, administrators, staff and volunteers for your commitment to educating and supporting our students. All of you make Owen J. Roberts School District a special place to work.

From our Wildcat family to yours, please enjoy a happy and safe summer. Everyone has earned a much needed break, and I cannot wait to welcome all of you back to an exciting new school year this August.

With appreciation,

Dr. Will Stout
Superintendent



Owen J. Roberts School District

Inspiring Each Student for Success Today and Greatness Tomorrow

Spring/Summer 2024 Edition

www.ojrsd.com

ADVOCATE

Connect • Unite • Succeed