



# SCHOOL news

Winter 2023-2024



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# From the Board

## Bryan Smith, Board of Education President

I am honored to serve as President of the Auburn-Washburn Board of Education during such a pivotal time of growth and progress. The district is in a unique position of expansion, which is evident in many ways but most notably and most visibly through the various construction and renovation projects currently underway.

Community support for these projects has been remarkable, beginning with the April 2022 passing of the bond election. The enhancements being made are nothing short of transformational. On behalf of the entire Board of Education, I thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Construction began this summer on many projects, and work will continue in phases over the next two years until every school building in the district has received significant upgrades and advancements. In the pages that follow, you will learn more about the specifics of these projects and how they are reshaping the educational landscape in our district.

As a Board, we take immense pride in the fact that 80 percent of construction is being carried out by local contractors – those who live and work alongside us in the greater Topeka community. Furthermore, it brings us great excitement to share that, despite prevailing supply challenges in the construction industry, all of our projects thus far have been on time and on budget. We will continue to do everything we can to ensure this trend continues.

For real-time updates on Auburn-Washburn's construction and renovation projects, including photos and live cam footage, visit [www.usd437.net/bond](http://www.usd437.net/bond). A robust timeline of upcoming activities is also available for your review.

Thank you for allowing me to serve you, and thank you for your continued support of public education and the Auburn-Washburn district.



# From the Superintendent

## Dr. Scott McWilliams, Superintendent of Schools

In Auburn-Washburn, our dedicated educators consistently explore innovative approaches to enrich students' learning experiences. Recognizing the evolving demands of the workplace beyond high school, we emphasize cultivating hands-on learners equipped with effective communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and teamwork skills. These crucial skills are seamlessly integrated into various lessons across all grade levels.

Our commitment to fostering a comprehensive understanding of subjects is reflected by incorporating real-world scenarios into the learning process. This approach empowers students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical solutions, significantly enhancing their retention and future application of information. Experiential learning also caters to diverse learning styles, accommodating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners alike.

In this edition of *School News*, each school proudly showcases student engagement activities that not only teach curriculum standards but also instill skills with

enduring applicability both within and beyond the school setting. It is amazing what our students are able to accomplish when guided by our talented staff.



Academic achievement is a longstanding pillar of success in Auburn-Washburn, and this is poised to continue. The high level of student engagement in a myriad of hands-on, experiential learning opportunities remains pivotal in preparing students for a future where they can confidently apply their acquired skills throughout their lives.

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Jessica Roberts, Managing Editor

**On the cover:**  
Student baristas at Common Grounds, one of three school-based enterprises at Washburn Rural High School, prepare drink orders for customers.





# TRANSFORMATIVE GROWTH

*Bond projects will enhance the entire educational experience*

**Significant renovation and construction projects are underway across the district. Among the most visible projects include construction of an Innovation Center at the high school, construction of a second middle school, and expansion of early childhood programs.**

A five-year strategic plan, developed with feedback and input from thousands of stakeholders, is the driving force behind the construction and renovation projects currently underway in the Auburn-Washburn district. Through the strategic planning process, several district priorities emerged, including expansion of early childhood education, a comprehensive assessment of K-12 school capacity and configuration, and enhanced career and technical training opportunities. These priorities played a pivotal role in the unanimous decision of the Board of Education to authorize a bond election.

Thanks to support from the school community, the bond election



*Innovation Center at Washburn Rural High School*

successfully passed in April 2022, allowing Auburn-Washburn to embark on a series of capital improvement projects to enhance the educational experience. Construction began this summer on many of those projects, and work will continue in phases over the next two years. Eventually, every building in the district will receive substantial upgrades.

## HIGH SCHOOL

The Innovation Center at Washburn Rural High School will provide new and expanded career and technical education opportunities for students to gain skills and experiences that can be applied to the workforce. The 50,000-square-foot addition is scheduled to open during the spring

2025 semester and will include a video production studio, agricultural lab and greenhouse, biosciences center, robotics and engineering

makerspace, and more. Other notable projects at the high school include renovations to many existing classrooms and the addition of a 10,000-square-foot multipurpose activity center.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL

An assessment of school capacity and configuration revealed a significant opportunity to improve the student experience by constructing a second middle school. Washburn Rural Middle School is currently the largest middle school in the state of Kansas, with enrollment nearing 1,000 seventh- and eighth-grade students. Building a second middle school will ease capacity concerns while simultaneously allowing sixth-graders to transition to middle school, a practice followed by most school districts in the state. It will also free up much-needed space in each of the elementary school buildings.

Construction on the second middle school began this past summer. The school will open for the 2025-2026 academic year and will serve students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.



*Middle School #2*

# The Shops at WASHBURN RURAL

*School-based enterprises add depth to the educational experience*



When students apply theories learned in the classroom to real-world situations, they gain a deeper understanding of abstract concepts and their practical applications. That is the power of experiential learning and the driving force behind Washburn Rural's three school-based enterprises – Common Grounds, The Shack, and WRHS Bank. Each enterprise is managed and operated by students as a hands-on learning laboratory, providing practical learning experiences to reinforce classroom instruction. In addition, each enterprise is affiliated with DECA and integrates National Curriculum Standards in marketing, finance, hospitality, or management.

## COMMON GROUNDS

Thirteen years ago, Washburn Rural High School partnered with PT's Coffee and Roasting Company to open a student-operated coffee shop called Common Grounds. Student baristas who work at the shop are enrolled in Marketing Management, an application-level course that expands students' marketing skills with an emphasis in business management and entrepreneurship. Working in the shop allows students

to gain experience in customer service, inventory, sales, and product development.

A core function of any business operation is to remain relevant by keeping abreast of market trends and preferences. Common Grounds is no different. Students are required to think strategically about every aspect of the business and to stay up-to-date on rules and regulations that may affect their operations. For instance, to adjust to new health guidelines, the shop recently switched to sugar-free syrups and one percent milk. They also started offering fruit smoothies as a healthy alternative to their higher calorie menu options. All drinks are priced at \$4 or less to accommodate the average income levels of their target market.

All promotions, advertisements, and social media content are created and managed by students. The shop maintains an active presence on Instagram and Twitter – platforms favored by their target audience – and offers coupons and other special deals to social media followers. They also provide giveaways during their annual Customer Appreciation Week in November.



## THE SHACK

The Shack is a student-run apparel and accessory store that provides real-world experience in product development, pricing, marketing, advertising, customer service, and business management. The storefront opened in 2014 and has since evolved into a Marketing Applications class, with students participating in every phase of the product life cycle – from design, to creation, to vendor selection and fulfillment.

The Shack strives to ensure all product offerings are desirable, affordable, and of the highest quality. "Following market trends and tracking demand allows The Shack to advertise and deliver the best products to our consumers," says Kim Sommers, business teacher and advisor. "Providing low stock initially allows for

a lower risk investment that can be increased over time depending on demand."

In addition to the storefront, a dedicated website

allows consumers to view and purchase products online at [ruralspirit.square.site](https://ruralspirit.square.site). Sweatshirts, stadium seats, and stocking caps are among the more popular product offerings, but there are also umbrellas, license plate brackets, and charging blocks. Pricing for those and other items is determined by students and based on a combination of input costs and market data.

## WRHS BANK

In partnership with Silver Lake Bank, the WRHS Bank opened for business in August 2005. Since then, more than 1,500 accounts have been opened. "We provide customers with the best banking environment while educating them about responsible financial practices," says Brian McFall, business teacher and advisor. "We also promote and provide an educational environment where students working in the bank can freely express their ideas to improve our services."

Financial literacy is an essential life skill, and the bank is doing its part to ensure all students understand the importance of budgeting, saving, and investing. In 2013, the bank started a savings and investment program called the Jr. Blue Crew to encourage students to get in the habit of saving money every month. The program continues to this day. Account holders who make a deposit of at least \$10 a month are eligible for monthly prizes as well as a \$500 grand prize at the end of the school year.



Students browsing the selection at The Shack

In addition to savings accounts, the bank handles the finances for all student-run businesses, the WRHS Parent-Teacher Organization, and various clubs and athletic teams. Dance tickets, play tickets, and club dues are also run through the bank.

## A MODEL FOR OTHERS

Each school-based enterprise provides remarkable learning opportunities for students. And proudly, each enterprise is profitable. Profits are used to fund scholarships for graduating seniors, assist with travel costs for student conferences, and provide philanthropic contributions to the school and community. The remaining profits are used for marketing, equipment repairs and upgrades, and other business-related enhancements.

The school-based enterprises are

a model for others to follow. "We have had schools from all over the U.S. inquire about our school-based enterprises," says McFall. "My best advice to them is to start small and have the students build the program each year."

The shops are open from 7:00—7:55 am and 12:00—1:15 pm on school days and other times on occasion. They operate under the guidance and direction of advisors Brian McFall, Kim Sommers, and Keaton Vander Hart. 

# School Highlights

## AUBURN ELEMENTARY

### Community partnerships

For students at Auburn Elementary, service and community go hand-in-hand. There is even a committee at the school dedicated to strengthening the bond between the school and the wider community through partnerships and service. In addition to a schoolwide community cleanup project in the spring, each grade level is connected to a business or organization in



Auburn. Students assist the businesses with various tasks, such as providing artwork for holiday greeting cards. In turn, the businesses support students with field trips, programs, and other initiatives. "Our partnerships teach the value of selfless service," said teacher Jill Beardslee. "They foster collaboration and build pride in our community." ★

## FARLEY ELEMENTARY

### Agricultural sustainability

Fifth grade students in Alexis Hewitt's class are utilizing an indoor hydroponics system to grow food. A technique that relies on a water-based solution rather than soil, the hydroponics system is introducing important STEM concepts into the classroom. Students are in charge of the daily care of plants, regularly testing the pH levels of the water and adding nutrients as needed. They are also responsible for harvesting the fruits, vegetables, and herbs once they have reached full maturity. "It is a great opportunity for students to gain a sense of ownership over the food they have grown and to be more open to trying fruits and vegetables they may not have tried in the past," said Hewitt. Bok choy, purple peas, and basil are among the first round of plants students are eager to harvest. Funding for the system was provided by the Auburn-Washburn Public Schools Foundation.★



## INDIAN HILLS ELEMENTARY

### Exploring cultures

Third-graders at Indian Hills embarked on a journey around the globe this holiday season to explore different cultures and traditions. They stopped in various countries to learn about traditional holiday celebrations and symbols, such as poinsettias, gingerbread, dreidels, panettones, gelt, and Swedish chocolate. As part of their travels, they discovered many similarities, but also some key differences between their own family traditions and those of others. "Through these experiences, our students are making connections to deepen their learning and extend their knowledge of customs, cultures, and traditions," said teacher Michelle Litton. "Learning about other cultures fosters empathy, understanding, and acceptance." Funding for supplies was provided by a classroom grant from the Auburn-Washburn Public Schools Foundation. ★



## JAY SHIDELER ELEMENTARY

### Cell biology and modeling

Sixth-graders at Jay Shideler Elementary spent part of the fall semester learning about the basic structure and function of cells. As part of their curriculum, they were tasked with creating an accurate representation of either an animal cell or a plant cell. "Making a 3D model helps students better understand cells and their organelles," said teacher DeAnne Beck. "It helps them conceptualize abstract concepts that can be hard to wrap your head around." Although the grading rubric detailed a list of necessary components, students were allowed to exercise their creativity in model design. And exercise creativity, they did! Among the more unique projects was a Pac-Man-themed model, a pillow, and a Christmas tree. ★





## PAULINE CENTRAL

### Leadership and service

For students at Pauline Central, being involved in Student Council (STUCO) is a great way to positively impact the school community. It is also a way to foster skills in leadership, collaboration, and service. STUCO representatives meet regularly to brainstorm ideas and facilitate activities that enrich the school. Throughout the year, members organize several events and activities, including canned food drives, school spirit weeks, and anti-bullying initiatives. Just recently, they brightened the holiday season by decking the halls at Pauline Central. They put their creative skills to work and made ornaments for the school's Angel Tree. "The ornaments were used to help brighten the holiday season for children and families in our community," said instructional facilitator Britt Garcia. 



## PAULINE SOUTH

### STEM-based learning

Fifth-graders at Pauline South have long participated in a five-day, STEM-based program at Forbes Field called Starbase. It is so highly regarded that advisors Shannon Mason, Kris Wanamaker, and Yaz Pettigrew partnered with Starbase on a STEM club for sixth-graders. The club meets weekly during the school year and explores various science, technology, engineering, and mathematics concepts. Membership is limited to 16 students and is driven by an application process that includes student essays and recommendation letters. Students have learned to code interactive robotics, construct marble roller coasters, and experiment with computer-aided design. "These are experiences they may not have had otherwise," said Mason. "It opens an entire world of career possibilities." 

## WANAMAKER ELEMENTARY

### Financial literacy

The "Woot Woot Wagon" at Wanamaker Elementary is helping sixth grade students learn important job skills they can apply in the real world. On early release days, a handful of students who have earned the responsibility, take the wagon around the school to sell snacks and beverages to staff. The concept was brought to life by teacher Chelsey Stephenson, who was exploring supplemental methods of teaching financial literacy and economics. "Among other things, students are learning about money management, budgeting, supply and demand, and inventory tracking," she said. "The experience is also building character and confidence." The initial start-up costs for the "Woot Woot Wagon" were provided by a classroom grant from the Auburn-Washburn Public Schools Foundation. 



## WASHBURN RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

### Space science and the solar system

Middle school students were tasked with creating and testing their own Mars rover landing modules as part of their exploratory studies on space science and the solar system. Using items such as cardboard, popsicle sticks, wheels, and shafts, students engineered devices to travel terrain in the form of a ramp and survive a fall at over 18-feet. "Our goal with this project is to create meaningful, authentic learning experiences," said science teacher Kathryn Louderback. "We encourage all of our students to view themselves as future engineers." Funding for the landing module supplies was provided by a classroom grant from the Auburn-Washburn Public Schools Foundation. 





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## SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS

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### WASHBURN RURAL HIGH SCHOOL

#### Emerging technologies

When it comes to emerging technologies, a high school mathematics classroom might not be the first place that comes to mind. A teacher at Washburn Rural High School wants to change that. Starting with this upcoming semester, students in Jessica Luse's algebra and integrated math courses will be utilizing 3D printed manipulatives to enhance their understanding of mathematical concepts. "Introducing 3D printing technology and software to the classroom will help students visualize objects in higher dimensions," said Luse. "In time, students will be able to print 3D representations of equations and explore different algebraic concepts, such as scale, perimeter, area, and volume." The plan is to begin experimenting with pre-designed manipulatives and work toward designing their own custom manipulatives in the future. Funds for the 3D printer were provided by a classroom grant from the Auburn-Washburn Public Schools Foundation. ★



Pauline Central Primary School

## BOND PROJECTS

<<<continued from page 3

Washburn Rural Middle School is undergoing three phases of construction — the first of which took place over the summer of 2023 when 24 classrooms were remodeled with new carpet, paint, operable walls, furniture, lighting, ceilings, and solar tubes. The next phase of construction will begin this upcoming summer when the science and special education classrooms are renovated, along with the library and commons areas.

#### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Construction and renovation at the elementary schools is also occurring in phases, with Pauline Central being the first to receive upgrades. Those upgrades include a significant addition to house both a six-room early childhood center and a community support room. Renovations to existing classrooms is still underway.

The next two elementary buildings to receive renovations will be Indian Hills Elementary and Jay Shideler Elementary. Design kickoff for both buildings will begin in January 2024, with construction scheduled to begin in summer 2025.

#### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

To address the significant need for early childhood education programs in the district, every elementary school building will be expanded to include an early childhood center. This will allow the district to serve nearly 500 children ages 3-5, more than double the current capacity. ★