



# SCHOOLnews

Spring  
2020-2021



***Auburn-Washburn Board of Education members navigate COVID-19 challenges***

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## Dr. Scott McWilliams, *Superintendent of Schools*

We are extremely excited about the future of the Auburn-Washburn School District! More light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel shines each week as we continue to seek a more normal, safe, and stable educational environment for students and staff.

Moving into the final quarter of the 2020-21 school year, all students have the opportunity to be in school, on-site, every day, approximately 85% of our staff have received the COVID-19 vaccine, and many end of year school events and activities will take place with the appropriate precautions in place.

Thank you to our amazing students, their dedicated families, and outstanding staff for remaining positive and patient and for being persistent and flexible as we have navigated the COVID-19 environment for the last 12 months.

As we look ahead to the 2021-22 school year, we will kick off a new Five-Year Strategic Plan that will focus on:

- 1) Academics
- 2) Skills for Success
- 3) Birth to Age 5
- 4) Social-Emotional Wellness
- 5) Instruction and Programming
- 6) Career and Technical Education
- 7) School size and capacity

Auburn-Washburn has a very proud tradition of high expectations, and as a result, our students and staff accomplish tremendous feats. These expectations and accomplishments will continue as we transition into our new five-year plan. The common goal in each of these areas is to seek effective, innovative, and sustainable ways to inspire, challenge, and prepare every child, every day. More detailed information will be shared with the Auburn-Washburn school community as we kick-off the upcoming school year in August. ★



## Tom Bruno, *Board of Education President*

There's no denying 2020 was a challenging year for all of us. Throughout much of the year, we've spent hours learning to use new electronic tools, scrambling to find creative new ways to provide education and engage with students learning from home, and

navigating the uncharted territory of a pandemic while trying to provide some sense of normalcy.

While for some, last year brought tremendous success, others have dealt with the pain of losing a job, a business, or even worse, losing a loved one. The Auburn-Washburn community has remained dedicated to providing students with supports to help make life more predictable and normal.

If I had to choose one word to describe our Auburn-Washburn staff and their amazing efforts for our students, that word would be Adaptability. But one word does not cover their heroic efforts and monumental achievements since March. Since March, I have witnessed countless acts of kindness, giving, and inspiration. There were staff parades through our

neighborhoods for our students, the transportation department and food service worked together to make sure that our students were fed, and there were countless hours worked by our custodial and facility staff preparing and cleaning our buildings. These are the actions that make our district a Community.

The challenges of this school year have been like no other. Change has been the most constant this year. Our staff has been given challenges that they have tackled head-on and succeeded. I am unable to adequately express my gratitude for their Herculean efforts.

I would also like to recognize the efforts of the rest of the Board of Education. None of us ran with any idea that, one day, we would be dealing with a pandemic. I ran to try and give back to the school district that has given me so much over the years. The Board recognized that there would be no easy answers as this school year began, and there would be no way to make everyone happy with the decisions we have been tasked with. I am honored to serve with such thoughtful, creative, and caring individuals who have helped make this challenge manageable. ★



# Statements from the Board of Education

## Michael White

I hope your family is healthy and finding the positive in an otherwise crazy world. Today's COVID environment has presented many challenges for our district, and I certainly think we have made the best of a difficult situation. When I ran for the school board in 2017, I never envisioned being a public servant during a pandemic. I want to say a big thank you to our students, parents, and all Auburn-Washburn staff for how they have approached this crisis as a team with a positive attitude. It certainly does not go unnoticed by the Board of Education just how our community has pulled together to continue the excellence in education we have come to expect.

I made the decision to run for the board because I wanted to help move our district forward and be an advocate for kids. Even through the pandemic, we have been working on some exciting things that we will be rolling out to the community over the next year. As a board, we want to look to the future, so we can position our district for success. Washburn Rural is a special community and even during difficult times like a pandemic, our district rises to the occasion because we care about our students. Great job by all and Go Jr. Blues!!



I am grateful for all the parents who reached out to us--and for those who didn't. Thank you for sticking up for your kids and for sticking with us, even when we made decisions you didn't like. To those outside our school walls, thank you for wearing masks and following all the health protocols--as tiresome as they may be. Your choices have made a direct impact on our ability to keep our students and staff healthy and in school. I am grateful to serve among you all.

## Matthew Ewald

This past year will be one we'll never forget, and one we'd all agree to never relive. While it has been tough to find decisions that are a win-win for everyone, we appreciate those of you who have stood up to share your voice. I'd like to thank all our key stakeholders for their patience and perseverance that has been required over the last year. Our most important responsibility is to work with you—students, families, district staff, school leaders, community leaders, local businesses, and residents—to ensure that our children have access to the best education. We have had to navigate change and the road hasn't been easy. My hope is that when we look back at the school years impacted by this pandemic, we don't dwell on the tough times we endured together but embrace the positives we can take away. Whether it be personally or professionally, we've been forced to do things differently and found new ways to teach, learn, communicate, and go about our daily lives. I couldn't be prouder of our Auburn-Washburn community, and I look forward to many great years ahead!



## Jacqueline Lightcap

Dozens of words come to mind when I think about the decisions we've made over the last 11 months, the stories we've heard from hundreds of parents and teachers, and the steep learning curve we've all experienced while pivoting in virtually every aspect of our lives. The word that sticks out the most right now is gratitude--deep gratitude for our administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, bus drivers, and food service workers who have kept this district moving forward, even when it may not have felt that way. I am grateful for our resilient students, who are learning a level of perseverance that my generation has never known.



## Tara Dimick

We have been fortunate to consider the people of Auburn-Washburn as an extension of our family in raising our three kids.

It was just a few days into starting Kindergarten when my oldest daughter, Hope (now 17) decided



# Statements from the Board of Education (continued)

that she was not going to go to school, and she meant it. When the day began, she wouldn't get on the school bus. It seems almost silly now, but we were not sure what to do or who to call, so, both my husband, Braden, and I decided we would take her to school together. She was already late and at this point she was kicking, screaming, and literally grabbing anything that she could find to keep her from having to go into the school. As we finally entered the doors of Jay Shideler, there was Mr. Freeman, waiting for us as if we had called ahead. Without judgment, he placed all his attention on Hope, took her in his arms, calmed her completely, and walked her down the hall toward her classroom. It was in that moment that I realized we weren't alone - we found our village that would help us raise our kids to be strong and confident adults. That was only the first of many stories that we have of how administration, faculty, teachers, and fellow parents have walked with us and our children through our best days and some of our worst. It's because of the community and the excellence that this district strives for that made me want to be a part of the school board.

Being a part of this team during the pandemic has been an honor and a privilege. It has given me the opportunity to watch our teachers, faculty, and administrators navigate and innovate to teach while continuing to strive for excellence in their work. It has also been so valuable to hear from parents and staff who, like me, want the very best for their children. While our ways to get there may vary, our final goal is the same - not just the education of our children, but excellence in that education to ensure that our children have what they need to create the future they desire.

Thank you for your commitment to our school district and each other. You are my village.

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## Bryan Smith

I have two daughters who attended school from kindergarten through graduation in USD 437. My youngest daughter is autistic. As a result, I became very familiar with the IEP process throughout her education. After both daughters graduated, I decided to run for the school board because I thought I could lend some insight into the special needs process, which can be very complicated and overwhelming for parents. Since becoming a board



member, I have been involved in the negotiations committee for teacher contracts. I also participated in the negotiation of an agreement to replace the turf on the football field at the high school. During the last year, I have participated as one of the seven members of the board who have guided the school district through the COVID pandemic. This has been a very challenging process, but also very rewarding. Going forward, we can use what we have learned from this past year to help our students to achieve even more success.

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## David Hines

I have felt fortunate to be a part of the Auburn-Washburn Board of Education for the past 10 years. It has been rewarding to serve, especially as I was able to see my two children come through our schools. I have seen many changes since I first began on the Board in 2011.



I appreciate the strong support the community has shown throughout the past decade. From the completion of major building projects to the expansion of programs and opportunities for students. This past year has been the most challenging during that time but I have been encouraged by the commitment and perseverance shown by our students, parents, staff, and my fellow Board members to overcome the obstacles and keep moving forward. ★

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### On the Cover

Auburn-Washburn Board of Education members  
Front (L to R): Matthew Ewald, Michael White;  
Center (L to R) Bryan Smith, Jacqueline Lightcap, Tara Dimick,  
Back (L to R) Tom Bruno, David Hines

Cover photo by *Melissa Kasprzyk, Centerpiece Photography*. ★



## Auburn Elementary

With the help of local organizations, a group of Auburn Elementary staff helped bring holiday joy to 13 students and their families. “I reached out to different community groups that were willing to adopt a child who attends Auburn Elementary and their family,” said organizer and preschool teacher Kirby Richard. She said that she confidentially contacted families to see if they were interested. She shared the wish lists with the participating partners who then bought, wrapped, and delivered gifts to the school. The gifts were distributed with the help of Auburn Elementary counselor Heather Gilliland and instructional facilitator Teresa Placheki. The different community groups that were able to help this year included: Auburn Lion’s Club, Auburn Fire Department, Auburn Volunteer Association, Auburn Elementary Staff, Auburn Elementary School PTO, Auburn Elementary STUCO, J & W Construction, Auburn Christian Church, Midwest Turf and Landscape, Auburn’s Landmark National Bank, and the Auburn Presbyterian Church. Richard said that it takes a lot of time and effort to coordinate the adoption, but “It’s all worth it when you see the relief in the parents’ eyes as they pick up the items knowing they will be able to give their kids a Christmas that they did not think was possible.” ★



ting to know the staff and students. However, she explained COVID-19 has presented challenges and has prevented her from meeting more Farley families. “It has been a bit of a wild ride being a principal during a pandemic,” she said. “I know how important it is to work closely with families, so I am looking forward to building those relationships when the pandemic is over.” ★

## Indian Hills Elementary

Each year, Indian Hills students have the opportunity to give back to our community by volunteering with the Marines for Toys for Tots. Social



Worker Katie Metzger meets regularly throughout the school year with students who have parents serving in the military. The Military Support group spent two evenings packaging up over 350 bags of toys for around 900 families across the state of Kansas. “It is amazing to see the joy across our student’s faces as they give back to those in need,” said Principal Chelsea Schmidlein. “On behalf of the Indian Hills team, we thank all of our service men and women!” ★

## Jay Shideler Elementary

With social distancing this year, Jay Shideler students are eating lunch in their classrooms. It is a challenge to cover all the classrooms over four lunch periods. To help out, several parents are lending a hand. The parents’ main job is to supervise students, but they also help deliver lunches, open condiments and milk, and help clean up. “It is a lot of fun,” said parent and PTO volunteer coordinator Jennifer Lebruska. “Of course we all enjoy getting to see our own kiddos at school, but we also have fun getting to know their friends and other students, seeing what they’re learning in school, hearing all their funny stories, and seeing their sweet smiling faces!” A total of 37 parents and grandparents logged 200 hours in the first month. “The teachers and staff were so appreciative and supportive too,” Lebruska said. “All of the parents and grandparents were just so happy to help and truly enjoyed the opportunity to volunteer at the school.” ★



## Farley Elementary



Stacy Novak began as principal of Farley Elementary this year. Novak said she was drawn to Farley Elementary because of its reputation. “It is known for the great education it provides and for the great support between staff and families,” she said. “I also loved that it serves a diverse community.” Novak came to Farley after 18 years of teaching and serving as a reading instructional coach. Most recently she was elementary principal in Ellinwood, Kan. Earlier in her career, Novak taught kindergarten for two years in Auburn-Washburn at Wanamaker Elementary. Novak said the students are the most rewarding part of the job. “I love seeing them excited about school and feeling like they belong to a great school,” she said. Novak also said it has been great get-

## Pauline Central Primary

Pauline Central had roughly 70% of families attend their first ever Virtual Family Engagement Night. The evening was filled with so much fun! They read a snowman story, made a snowman, honed science and math skills as we invented a trap for the snowman, and made a puppet show. Creativity and smiles were everywhere. Thank you to the Discovery Center of Kansas for their generous donation, which helped us make this night possible for the families. ★



the constant changes in how meals would be packaged, the concern if the product would be available, trying to maintain social distancing in a confined work environment, and even the weather, since rain or shine, they were outside to ensure students had a meal available. Baurley said that food service staff had to be flexible and willing to learn areas outside of their normal job description along with the changes thrown at them. Team members include Michelle Evans, Patricia Powell, Kathy Reihm, Benjamin Rickel, Susan Vitt, Dannel Wright, and Pam Grossnickle. “We were excited that we could continue to serve our students and even get to see some of their faces,” Baurley said. She said that many Pauline South students depended on the daily school meals, both before and during the pandemic. “I hope our efforts gave them a form of normalcy in their ever-changing days,” she said. “The support we received from the community was heartwarming, and it was fun getting to know some of our students’ friends and families.” ★



## Pauline South Intermediate

Like school kitchens across the district, Pauline South has played a vital role in the district’s efforts during the pandemic. In the beginning, they participated in preparing the meals distributed at Pauline Central. When the kitchen closed for summer, the staff joined the crew at Washburn Rural High School to continue to support meal services there. When school resumed in hybrid phase this fall, Pauline South became one of the remote meal distribution locations. “During the pandemic, every day brought new challenges,” said Pauline South Food Service Manager Jennifer Baurley, “But I tried to stay positive and see the challenges as another learning experience.” Baurley said the challenges included

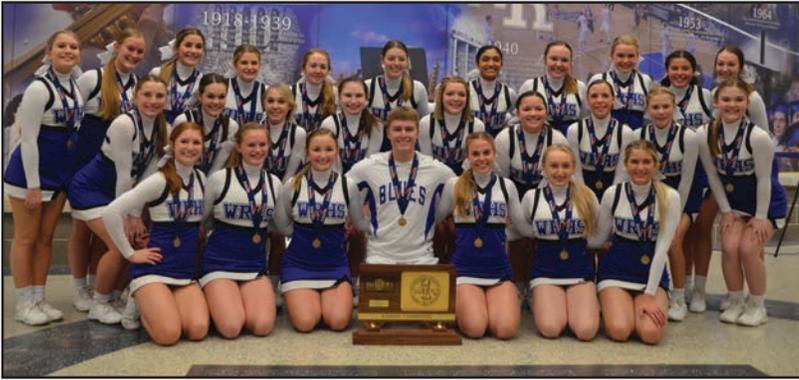
## Wanamaker Elementary

Some students at Wanamaker Elementary have been learning fundamentals of graphic design and digital illustration from 6th grade teacher Sandra Romero. The students have been creating projects primarily using the program Adobe Photoshop Sketch and will transition to Adobe Illustrator Draw. “Part of the fundamentals of design elements that they have learned include understanding opacity, object transformation, resizing, color, and implementing shapes,” said Romero. The technical elements they are learning include understanding file types, renaming layers, and understanding icons. Romero says they are also learning how to be self-sufficient when trying to create something unique by researching the various ways it can be accomplished.

“Their first project was to recreate an image or drawing,” Romero said. “Some have taken to creating multiple drawings.” She said their next project will include learning typographical skills and how to create attention grabbing posters. ★



# Washburn Rural High School



The Washburn Rural High School Cheerleading team won the Kansas State High School Activities Association Class 6A Game Day Spirit Showcase. To win the championship, the team competed in a three-minute routine that included a band dance, crowd leading, and the school fight song. The team was judged on several components of the routine, but the overall goal was about leading the crowd in a game day environment. "This was especially hard to do since there was no crowd to cheer with due to COVID-19 restrictions," said Head Cheerleading Coach Taylor McKaig. The competition was held virtually in November. "We had to record and upload our routine for judging," McKaig said. "We had a virtual awards ceremony on November 23rd where we were named 2020 6A State Champions!" The team includes Ava Leonard, Avani Gupta, Cadyn Currie, Caitlynn Manthe, Daymon Mays, Delaney Williams, Elizabeth Fender, Ella Hiestand, Ellie Armstrong, Emery Wilkerson, Emily McIntosh, Grace Haines, Gracie Vandeveld, Hayden Wilkerson, Jayden Grabauskas, Kaitlyn Hammons, Kaitlyn Morris, Karley Zimmerman, Kenzie Teal, Kyndall Rose, Lydia Etzel, Maddy Price, Madison Hermann, Natalie Robinson, Olivia Newell, Olivia Wiksten, Raegan Jacobs, Sadee Markham, and Sophia Wiksten.

Washburn Rural High School also won the KSHSAA 4-Speaker State Championship. The team included juniors Sonya Doubledee, Donna Jalosjos, Jiyoona Park, and Zach Willingham. According to Debate Coach Tim Ellis, the 4-Speaker state tournament



consists of four team members, two who take the affirmative position on the debate topic, and two others who take the negative side of the topic. "Both of our teams debated seven rounds at the tournament," Ellis said. "The two teams went a combined 12-2 in their 14 debates and finished not only as the top team of four debaters, but the top two individual teams." With a 12-2 finish, WRHS locked up a state championship by several rounds. "The second and third place teams finished with a 9-5 record, and we actually entered the final round of the competition knowing that we had already secured a championship," Ellis said. "This was our 5th consecutive state championship in debate. Washburn Rural is the first school in the history of the 6A classification to secure five straight state championships." To win the championship, the Washburn Rural High School team competed against Blue Valley, Blue Valley North, Blue Valley West, Lawrence, Lawrence Free State, Olathe Northwest, and Olathe South.



Art student Chloe Wolgast recently received state recognition for her work entitled "Fast Food Heroes: Keeping American Fueled #Covid19." The piece was nominated for Scholastics Arts and Writing American Visions Award and received a Scholastics Gold Key. "This is a huge achievement as the work was recognized by a panel of creative professionals as the most outstanding work submitted among all peers," said WRHS Art Teacher Miranda Figgs.

The Eastern Kansas Scholastic Art Awards Exhibition was on view at Mark Arts in Wichita through March. Information is available at [MarkArtsKS.com/scholastic](http://MarkArtsKS.com/scholastic). Mark Arts also held a Virtual Award Ceremony March 27. ★



## Washburn Rural Middle School

Washburn Rural Middle School reading plus teacher Randi Stones has received a Classroom Grant from the Kansas Association of American Educators. The \$500 grant was used to purchase paperback copies of the novels that students read. “We teach annotation as a research-based, close reading strategy but then we give students school-issued books, which they aren’t allowed to annotate,” Stones said. “Giving them their own copies frees them up to highlight, underline, make notes in the margins, and really engage with the text.” It also gives students a book to keep to add to their personal collections. Stones shared the following reactions she received from students: “I like that I can keep it;” “I like the feeling of responsibility;” “I like the idea that this book

will be something to remember my 7th grade year by;” and “I think it’s very considerate of teachers to give us our own books.” ★



### Key Dates for School Year 2021-2022

- August 12 – First Day of School
- September 6 & 27 – No School
- October 8, 14-15 – No School
- November 24-26 – No School
- December 20-January 3 – Winter Break
- January 17 – No School
- February 10-11, 14 – No School
- March 11 – No School
- March 14-18 – Spring Break
- April 15 & 18 – No School
- May 6 – No School
- May 25 – Last Day of School

See a complete calendar at [usd437.net](http://usd437.net). ★