



**Happy New Year 2024 and welcome back, Green Bear Nation!**

The district is excited to welcome back your students today as we kick off the second half of our school year. As we move forward, communication from my office remains a top priority. I am reaching out to everyone today with some important updates and a “save the date” for your calendars.

- **Update on JHHS Athletic Department changes and our plan for the future:** As you may be aware, the Board officially accepted Athletic Administrator Ms. Tammy Talmage’s retirement/resignation just before the start of winter break. We are grateful to Tammy for her years of service and dedication to Ottawa Hills. Moving forward, the district will be conducting a formal search for a permanent replacement starting with a posting of the position in early March. As superintendent, I will be working in partnership with building principal Mr. Ben McMurray to establish a team (with representation from our staff, Boosters, student athletes and the community at large) to help select the best candidate. In the meantime, Mr. Rick Kaifas will continue to serve as our Interim Athletic Administrator through the end of this school year. All decisions on hiring coaches and other athletic staff for upcoming sports seasons will be made by the new Athletic Administrator, Mr. McMurray, and myself.
- **School Safety, always at the forefront:** It is important to recognize and remind everyone, especially with the recent school shooting in Iowa last week, that school safety is always at the forefront of our operations. Our buildings have strict entry and exit procedures for our students, staff and visitors, and doors are locked with only one official entrance/exit to the building throughout the school day. We continue to partner with the OHPD to help monitor our daily arrival, dismissal, and lunch release times. This year we received additional safety grant funding which allowed us to upgrade and purchase new security cameras both inside and outside our buildings, provide continued safety training to students and staff, and make more building improvements for increased safety.
- **District financial work and transparency remain priority:** The district team has been focused on approaching financial decisions differently in an effort to ensure every cost saving where possible and explore new ways to generate revenue for the district’s operating budget. Based on the latest CUPP financial report (district profile on spending) from the State of Ohio, the impact of our cost savings efforts and tightened spending has already been realized. Ottawa Hills’ spending per pupil is down \$22 from a year ago (now \$17,904) while the new peer comparison went up \$2,300 overall on average. We are now at a lower cost to educate than our state recognized peer performing districts - statewide these figures went up an average of \$800 per school. The district is pursuing state reimbursements for our court-placed special education students, which is projected to provide \$30,000 in revenue to offset costs incurred. Also, our interim treasurer is working with our banking institution to renegotiate our daily interest earnings which should provide an additional \$35,000 in annual revenue. These are just a few of the examples of new ways we are working more efficiently to gain any additional funding where possible to support our students. In January, the Board will vote to implement a new minimum 30-day cash balance policy. We will continue to keep you updated through our “Friday Finance Update” section of the district newsletter every Friday as more is accomplished.

- **Board search process for treasurer/CFO continues this week:** After a first and second round of interviews, which included representation from our administration, the teacher's association, community members and new school board members, the new Board of Education will proceed with a third-round interview of a final candidate on Wednesday. Until a new fulltime Treasurer/CFO is in place, Mr. Cajon Keeton remains our Interim Treasurer and is supporting the day-to-day operations and finances of the district. We will keep everyone updated as this process continues.
- **Facts about the March operating levy:** A reminder that a new 12.9 mill operating levy will be on the March 19, 2024, ballot for Ottawa Hills Schools. Revenue generated by the passage of this levy will allow the district to maintain its current level of staffing and services to our students. If the levy is not successful, the district will need to eliminate an additional \$1.5 million from its operating budget going into the 2024-2025 school year. With close to \$2 million in cost savings already achieved by the district over the past year, expenses are already reduced and at minimum levels required to operate the buildings and supply classrooms with needed materials. Additional savings will primarily need to come from personnel. The district is developing a plan to support a balanced budget with no additional funding for the 2024-2025 school year. This plan will include eliminating classroom teachers at both levels, an administrator, elective programs, student support positions, as well as some sports and extracurriculars. More specific information on this will be shared in the coming weeks leading up to the March election.
- **“Save the Date” for the annual State of the District event:** Mr. Cajon Keeton and I, along with student leaders from both buildings, will be hosting the annual “State of the District” on Wednesday, January 31, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. in the high school auditorium. We plan to review both highlights and challenges from the last year, discuss district goals and priorities moving forward, and provide a full review of our district finances leading up to the March operating levy. This year, there will also be an open Q & A session held at the end. If you are unable to attend the event in person, the presentation and Q & A session will be live streamed and recorded. View the livestream, and see all recordings of past Board meetings by clicking [here](#).

I know the first half of our school year has presented our district with some unique challenges. But I also know that we have had a lot to celebrate too. On behalf of all five of the school board members, our administrative team, and our faculty and staff please trust that our #1 priority each and every day is to keep your children safe and provide them with the best educational experience we can.

Thank you for your ongoing support. I look forward to working together as a community to remain **Green Bear Strong**, and make this new year, the best year yet!

Thank you.

Dr. Adam Fineske  
Superintendent