

# THE PIPER PRESS

FALL 2024



Piper USD 203

INCLUSIVITY | INNOVATION | COMMUNITY | INTEGRITY | PASSION

# FROM *the* HELM

A Message from the Superintendent, Dr. Jessica Dain



As we reflect on the progress in the Piper School District, it's clear that what sets us apart is our commitment to creating a learning environment in which our students WANT to be a part. While many districts across Kansas face challenges with chronic absenteeism, Piper School District is achieving a 95% attendance rate. This success speaks volumes about the work our educators do daily to make school relevant, engaging, and inspiring. Through our #FUTUREREADY focus, we're not just preparing students for the future – we're creating an experience that makes them excited to come to school every single day.

Our high school's wall-to-wall career academies have been instrumental in driving this excitement, but our focus on

future- readiness begins well before high school. Throughout grades K-8, grade-level teams are aligning with our high school academies, integrating #FUTUREREADY projects and presentations rooted in our Portrait of a Graduate. From hands-on career fairs and after-school clubs to tech-rich classrooms and intentional incorporation of artificial intelligence, our younger Pirates are experiencing education that's not only engaging but also forward-thinking. We are laying the groundwork early, ensuring all students are on a path toward innovation and success.

This quarter's newsletter showcases the incredible initiatives happening across the district, demonstrating that we are dedicated to preparing every student for the future. We invite you to dive into these stories, feel the energy and passion that permeate our schools, and, as always, #BELIEVETHEHYPE.

Proud to be a Pirate,

*Jessica*

*Pictured here: 5th graders proudly showcased five weeks of hard work studying natural disasters and finding creative ways to support impacted communities. They demonstrated #FUTUREREADY skills by presenting their work to professionals who work for national disaster agencies across the Kansas City Metropolitan.*



# #FUTUREREADY ELEMENTARY



At the elementary level, Piper focuses on **INSPIRING** students with interactive career awareness activities and #FUTUREREADY projects. Each of these awareness activities includes our Portrait of a Piper Graduate Competencies and direct connections to industry partners.

## MEET JESSICA ASBURY

Piper's Elementary Real World Learning Coordinator

With over two decades of experience, Jessica Asbury has taught every elementary grade level and later transitioned into roles such as technology integrationist, STEM educator/coordinator, and gifted facilitator. She works closely with international nonprofits like Code.org and Project Lead the Way to empower teachers to bring 21st-century skills to life in their classrooms. She is also active in the Kansas City workforce development ecosystem with memberships in organizations such as KC Women in Technology, advocating for equitable access to personalized learning for all students. She currently serves as Piper Elementary's Real World Learning Coordinator, working to align innovative content, instructional practices, and career exposure to ensure all students build to the district's Portrait of a Graduate.





### Touch-A-Truck Day

Students at Piper Early Childhood Center and Piper Prairie Elementary welcomed community partners for Touch-A-Truck Day! Thank you to the Unified Government of KCK & WYCO, Kansas City Kansas Fire Department, Kansas City Kansas Police Department, Kansas City Board of Public Utilities, Waste Management, and many others who volunteered their time to brighten our kids' day! What a testament to the amazing community we have here in Piper USD 203!



### Kiss A Cow Fundraiser

Fox 4 News Kansas City stopped by Piper Creek to capture the excitement as students watched their teachers "Kiss A Cow" for Mrs. Whaley's 5th Grade Hurricane Helene Relief Fundraiser tied to their studies of natural disasters. Mrs. Morgan Crusoe and Ms. Amy Higdon were the lucky winners who got to kiss Maria the cow. A special thank you to Emma and McCracken Livestock for bringing Maria to the assembly and the entire 5th grade for their excellent work in raising funds for victims of natural disasters. All of the projects were tied to their agilities and #FutureReady curriculum.



## #FUTUREREADY SECONDARY

At the middle school level, Piper IGNITES students' individual passions and begins linking those directly to careers of interest. The Academy exploration courses help students deepen their understanding of the workforce and culminates in students electing an Academy which provides a lens to direct their studies at the High School.

### Academy Prep - Health & Life Sciences

Students learned from University Health about clinical and non-clinical careers and healthcare, practicing phlebotomy, and creating prosthetics. Academy Prep 7 focuses on the Health and Life Sciences Academy during the fall quarters. #ignitetheype

Piper Middle School now has an official chapter of HOSA – Future Health Professionals, formerly known as Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA). It is an international career and technical student organization endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education and the Health Science Technology Education Division of ACTE.



### Ignite Career Connections Event

Eighth grade students explored their options at the Ignite Career Connections event, where local employers helped students see how their interests align with real-world career paths. This event encouraged students to connect their academy choices with a variety of industries, showing them that each academy offers pathways to a future of possibilities!



At the high school level, the students IMMERSE in their chosen career pathway, and explore the various sectors within each discipline. The experience culminates in a year-long capstone course that allows students to showcase their work and create industry-specific experiences that reflect their unique learning.

### Extrication Lab - Fire Science 1

In this hands-on lesson, students in Fire Science 1 learned how to safely lift a vehicle off a person using airbags and wooden cribbing – simulating the skills they’d need to help save lives in a real-world emergency. Fire Science is a sector within the Public Services Academy and this example showcases our students immersing in a hands-on, experiential learning environment.



### MEET POLLY VADER

Piper’s Secondary Coordinator of Real World Learning and Career and Technical Education

In her 20th year in education, Polly has served as an educator, counselor, coach, and coordinator. She holds a B.S. in Secondary Education from Kansas State University and an M.S. in School Counseling and Educational Administration licensure from Emporia State University. Currently, she is Piper’s Coordinator of Real World Learning and Career and Technical Education, having previously served as a high school counselor and CTE Department chair. A recognized leader, Vader was named the 2024 Real World Learning Coordinator of the Year by the Kauffman Foundation and has been nominated for the K-ACTE CTE Administrator of the Year Award. She actively supports initiatives such as Impact KCK, Avenue of Life for homeless students, and serves as a district liaison to civic and workforce organizations to enhance student opportunities.



# A PASSION FOR PURPOSE: PREPARING PIPER MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE

From Topeka to Piper, one Family Consumer Science (FACS) teacher's journey is inspiring students to embrace the skills they'll need to thrive in the real world. As the District's Secondary Horizon Award nominee and the leader of a nationally recognized FACS program, Riley O'Brien exemplifies Piper's commitment to being #FutureReady through hands-on, real-world learning experiences.

After graduating from Kansas State University in 2023, she set her sights on Piper, a district she had heard so much about. "When I saw an opening at the middle school during student teaching, I knew I had to apply," O'Brien said. Though originally planning to teach at the high school level, she found her passion in middle school. "The chaos of the age group suits me—I can't really imagine being anywhere else."



While her path to teaching wasn't straightforward, it was driven by purpose. She shifted majors in college before settling on Family Consumer Science, a subject that aligned perfectly with her desire to equip students with real-life skills. "I've always been passionate about preparing students for life beyond the classroom, and Family Consumer Science felt like the perfect way to do that," she said. "FACS gives students who might struggle in core subjects a chance to shine."

In just two years, O'Brien has transformed the program into a dynamic space for students to discover their potential. This effort was recognized when she was named the District's Secondary Horizon Award nominee. "This recognition reassures me that my efforts are making a difference," she said. "It motivates me to keep growing as an educator and continuing to create meaningful opportunities for my students."

One such opportunity came through the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) program. Last year, five students advanced to the FCCLA National Leadership Conference in Seattle, Washington, a moment of pride for both O'Brien and the district.



“This trip wasn’t just about competition—it was about opening doors to new opportunities and helping students see what they’re capable of on a national stage,” she said. Beyond workshops and presentations, the students explored Seattle landmarks like the Space Needle and the Museum of Pop Culture. “For some of them, it was their first time flying. Seeing them grow and create lasting memories was incredible. Having three students place in the Top 10 nationally and one in the Top 20 was the icing on the cake.”

Back in the classroom, Food Truck Fridays have become one of the program’s most celebrated projects. This hands-on initiative challenges eighth graders to create and manage their own food truck businesses, teaching them skills like budgeting, marketing, and teamwork. “This project teaches perseverance, problem-solving, and collaboration—skills that extend far beyond the classroom,” O’Brien explained. “Students discover how to handle setbacks and celebrate progress, preparing them to navigate the complexities of the real world with confidence.”

The program’s curriculum emphasizes practical learning designed to prepare students for success in life and work. Culinary labs teach food preparation and time management, while sewing challenges inspire creativity and technical skills. Career exploration projects help students research potential careers, strengthening their research, presentation, and digital literacy abilities. These projects embody Piper’s commitment to #FutureReady education by equipping students with real-world skills they can immediately apply.

Looking to the future, O’Brien is excited to expand the program with new courses in Interior Design and Child Development. “I love dreaming big and challenging myself to create new opportunities for my students,” she said. Each course is designed to provide practical, transferable skills that will empower students to succeed beyond the classroom.

Her advice for other educators is simple: don’t be afraid to take risks. “Ask for help and trust the process,” she encouraged. “Reframe doubts from ‘What if it doesn’t work?’ to ‘What if it does?’ Growth happens when we try.”

The impact of the Family Consumer Science program is clear, with increasing student interest in classes and FCCLA participation. “Students hear about the cool things we’re doing and want to be part of it,” she said.

Through passion, innovation, and a relentless focus on real-world learning, this Family Consumer Science teacher is helping Piper students become #FutureReady. By instilling them with skills they’ll carry for a lifetime, she is shaping not only her students’ futures but also the future of the entire community.





# FALL SPORTS - STATE QUALIFIERS



## Girls Tennis State Qualifiers

The Piper Girls Tennis team celebrated a historic season, culminating at the state tournament in Andover, KS. Senior **Avary Vallejo** led the charge, becoming the first player in program history to win a state tournament match, finishing her stellar season with a 23-10 record. Sophomore **Ann McPherson** impressed in her debut season, narrowly missing victory in a hard-fought opening round. The doubles team of junior **Allison Ochs** and sophomore **Aubrey Eidson** showed resilience in their second state appearance, promising continued growth. With a 15th-place state finish and only one senior graduating, the Pirates' future shines bright. Congratulations to **Coaches Bryan Shelley and Matt Storrer** on a fantastic season.



## Cross Country

The Piper Cross Country team had an exceptional season under **Coaches Cassie Dolinar, Pete Diehl, and Bob Lockwood**, highlighted by standout performances at regionals and state. Junior **Elizabeth Arenas** placed 12th at regionals with a personal best of 20:02 in the 5k, earning her third consecutive trip to the state meet. Junior **Quinn Hanson** placed 7th with a personal record of 16:44, becoming the second-fastest Pirate in school history and qualifying for state cross country for the first time. At the 5A State Meet, Elizabeth posted a personal best on the challenging Rimrock course, while Quinn powered through rain-soaked conditions to achieve another personal best. Both runners are leading one of the most talented teams in Piper history.



## Girls Golf

### Coached by Jennifer Warneke and Jordan Shaner

**Allyson McKinney** recently made an impressive return to the state golf tournament for a second year after placing 18th at the 5a regional golf tournament. Despite a challenging four-hour rain delay, she remained focused and determined, completing her senior season with multiple personal records and remarkable improvements in her game at every tournament. Her dedication and perseverance have not only made us proud but have also set a standard of excellence for our team. She will be greatly missed in the Piper golf program.

Congratulations to all of our student-athletes on a great Fall season!

## HOMECOMING 2024

Piper USD 203 is thrilled to celebrate the outstanding senior students selected to represent our school on this year's Homecoming Court! Pictured on the left: **King and Queen winners, Ace Johnson and Adriana Lopez.** Congratulations to all the nominees:

### Queen Candidates:

Rylee Hafner  
Abbie Roth  
Avary Vallejo  
Rylie Wiseman

### King Candidates:

Coltyn Bard  
Cooper Busick  
Ramon Marks  
Tannar McDaniel



## HORIZON AWARD NOMINEES



Congrats to Taylor McEachron, 3rd grade teacher, and Riley O'Brien, Piper Middle School Family and Consumer Science teacher, on being nominated as the Kansas State Department of Education Horizon Award winners from Piper. KSDE recognizes and rewards first-year teachers who have served as examples of excellent teaching in their elementary or secondary classroom.

## KANSAS TEACHER OF THE YEAR DISTRICT NOMINEES



Congrats to Allison Carey, Piper Creek Technology teacher and Sonny Bourne, Piper Middle School Social Studies teacher, on being nominated as the Kansas State Department of Education Kansas Teacher of the Year district nominees from Piper. Your dedication to excellence in education and your unwavering commitment to empowering students have made a lasting impact on our district. We are incredibly proud of your achievements!

# KANSANS CAN STAR RECOGNITION PROGRAM



## PIPER 2024 STAR RECOGNITIONS:

-  **GOLD**  
INDIVIDUAL PLAN OF STUDY
-  **SILVER**  
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL GROWTH
-  **BRONZE**  
KINDERGARTEN READINESS
-  **COPPER**  
ACADEMICALLY PREPARED FOR POST-SECONDARY

The Piper School District has earned multiple distinctions in the 2024 Kansans Can Star Recognition Program, including the prestigious GOLD STAR for its Individual Plan of Study for the second consecutive year, remaining the only district in Kansas to achieve this honor. Additional accolades include a SILVER STAR for Social Emotional Growth, a BRONZE STAR for Kindergarten Readiness, and a COPPER STAR for Academic Preparedness for Postsecondary. Piper USD 203 is recognized for fostering inclusive, high-quality learning experiences that connect academic knowledge with technical and employability skills, emphasizing career exploration from elementary school onward.

## HAVE YOU SEEN THE GIVING WALL AT PIPER HIGH SCHOOL?

We're excited to announce that sales are now open for the next installment! What better way to celebrate the holidays than with a gift of legacy? A personalized plaque on the Piper Giving Wall is a meaningful way to honor alumni, community members, and business partners who support our students and staff! Scan the QR code below for more info or to purchase!



RETURN ADDRESS LOCATION

POSTAL  
INDICIA  
LOCATION