

Community Newsletter

Spring 2025

Dear Hilltopper Community,

I am thrilled to be writing to you today as the next superintendent of this great district. As someone with ties to the area, I have always admired the strong sense of pride and community here in Onalaska. Now, I have the honor of joining this team of dedicated educators, families, and community members with the incredible responsibility of helping students explore interests, chase dreams, and reach their full potential. I am truly grateful for the opportunity.

All students can learn; all students want to learn. This guiding principle has shaped my career from the very beginning. I started as a high school health and physical education teacher in the Twin Cities, where I also coached wrestling, football, and track. During those early days in the classroom and on the field, I learned the importance of teamwork and collaboration in student growth and success - values I'm proud to know are staples in Onalaska as shown by the district's mission of working together to ensure high levels of learning for all. I am committed to continuing this effort to create meaningful learning experiences that challenge, support, and inspire every student.

On a personal note, my family is deeply rooted in this area. I was born and raised just up the Mississippi River in Wabasha, Minnesota where I met and eventually married my high school sweetheart, Jodi. Together, we have two beautiful children and two grandchildren who live near Onalaska. To say we're excited for the bonus of living closer to family would be an understatement.

I look forward to meeting many of you in the coming months. In addition to our students, another top priority of mine is being part of this community! Whether it be school events, community gatherings, or simply around town - plan to see me out and about! When you do, please never hesitate to strike up a conversation. Listening and learning from you will be an essential part of my transition as superintendent of this great school district.

Thank you for all you do for our students, schools, and district. I can't wait to get started! Now to get started on adding more purple to my wardrobe…

Your next superintendent,

Ben Barton

Ben Barton



Superintendent Search Update

The Board of Education announced the selection of Ben Barton as the next superintendent for the School District of Onalaska on March 10. His official start date is July 1, 2025. Learn more about the process, including Superintendent Barton's background, by visiting onalaskaschools.com/superintendent-search.

GOOD TO KNOW



Now Accepting New Student Enrollment

Have a child ready to start their educational journey? Just moved to Onalaska and need to get your student signed up for school? New student enrollment for the 2025-26 school year is now open! Visit onalaskaschools.com/enrollment to get started! **While enrollment is open all summer and into the school year, enrolling as soon as possible helps our schools plan out class sizes and staffing.**

Have questions? **Student Services is here to help**: 608.783.4610 or psinfo@onalaskaschools.com

Current Student Information Update

Have a student in the district that will still be a student in the district come fall? This notice is for you! Every year, the district asks parents and guardians to update their child's student information between school years. This helps our schools best serve students by having the most accurate and current information in our system. This is done through what we call **Returning Student Registration.** Please be on the lookout for additional communication on this before the school year ends and over the summer! Thank you for your cooperation!

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

The district is looking for feedback from community members on its educational programming, financial management, and communication efforts through a short online survey.

To take it, scan the QR code or visit onalaskaschools.com/community-survey

If you would like a paper copy, please call 608.781.9700 or email communications@onalaskaschools.com.

New Community Email Listing

The School District of Onalaska is starting an email listing for community members! Sign up to receive periodic updates featuring district news, student achievements, activities information, construction updates, job openings, and opportunities to get involved.

To sign up, scan the QR code or visit onalaskaschools.com/email-updates

PRE-K PREVIEW

Have a child that will be 4 before September 1st? With enrollment now open, it might be time to start considering your child's educational options! Here in Onalaska, we offer pre-k in each of our elementary schools and have a fantastic, experienced, and passionate team of teachers!



Tracy Hagen
Eagle Bluff Pre-K Teacher



Valarie Olson
Irving Pertzsch Pre-K Teacher



Janie Lundstrom
Northern Hills Pre-K Teacher

How long have you been teaching?

I've been teaching for 31 years, 18 at Eagle Bluff!

I've been teaching for 24 years, 8 at Irving Pertzsch!

I've been teaching for 34+ years, 14 at Northern Hills!

What are your favorite classroom activities?

I enjoy creating activities that encourage children to wonder and learn. Some of my favorites include making puppets, tie dyeing, and baking with the children.

Journal writing and learning how to make pizza from scratch! We also do a year-long book project that our students make for their families.

I have always loved reading, math, dancing, singing, and all areas of learning! I really enjoy activities that spark children's imaginations and creativity.

Why is Pre-K an important step in a student's education?

Pre-K builds a foundation for social-emotional growth, academic achievement, and a lifelong love of learning. It provides a safe environment for your child to explore, wonder, and discover while being supported by a loving pre-K team.

There are so many non-academic things we learn in Pre-K like waiting your turn, making friends, being part of a big group, walking the halls, etc. Because our program is half days, it's also a great stepping stone before kindergarten!

I love this age so much! Young children are taking in so much of the world around them. In our classrooms, children have opportunities to build their confidence. They will also learn more about themselves as part of a community.

You can read more from our Pre-K team on our website! Interested in enrolling? Head to onalaskaschools.com/enrollment!



District Construction Update

The middle and high school building projects continue to progress. At OMS, the 8th grade addition off Quincy Street (pictured above) is nearing completion. Progress has also been made in the co-curricular space including the completion of one of the new music rooms. Since our last update, the new OMS fieldhouse was also finished and is now being used for classes and after-school activities. The current areas of focus at OHS continues to be the tech ed and music learning spaces. The overall target date for both projects remains September 2025. We are incredibly grateful for the community's long-term investment in our schools. These updates are already making a big difference for our staff and students! For timely construction project updates, visit onalaskaschools.com/district/building-updates.



Middle School Fieldhouse



Middle School Band Room



High School Tech Ed Addition

Safety Updates

We are committed to enhancing the safety and security of our schools. As part of the ongoing renovations funded by our 2022 referendum, we are installing new safety equipment and technology at both the middle and high schools. This includes upgraded door access systems, cameras, and software to further strengthen security.

Outside the scope of the referendum, we are also implementing new door access and entry camera systems at each elementary school to further improve safety.

On a related note, a friendly reminder about our visitor protocol: All visitors are required to enter through a school's main entrance. If your visit extends beyond the main office and into the school, you will need to log into our visitor management system and present a valid driver's license for screening.

The safety of our students and staff remains our top priority. Thank you for your support and cooperation.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE DISTRICT

Student Wins National App Challenge



OHS student Ali Abidi won the 2024 Congressional App Challenge Award in Wisconsin's Third District. The challenge is a national initiative set by the U.S. House of Representatives where members host app contests in their districts for middle and high school students to encourage STEM education. Ali created the winning "ApolloHealth" app, which gives users the ability to easily search for medical services in Wisconsin using their current location or zip code. You can watch Ali's full presentation at www.congressionalappchallenge.us.



Onalaska Visits the Capitol

Interim Superintendent Fran Finco and Board of Education Member Mark Cassellius visited the State Capitol as part of a Wisconsin Association of School Boards event. They joined more than 100 other school board members and superintendents from across the state.

Fran and Mark met with the offices of Brad Pfaff and Steve Doyle. Topics included requests to increase special education funding as well as indexing revenue limit increases to match inflation. For 2024-25, special education costs in Onalaska are budgeted at $7.4M. Of that total, current expected amounts to be covered are: federal $800K (11%); state $1.7M (23%), and local $4.9M (66%).

Inflation

Since 2008, revenues per student in Wisconsin have not kept up with rising costs, creating a funding gap of approx. $3,380 per student per year. In Onalaska, that equates to a yearly deficit of $8.7M. To help cover operating costs, the community supported the district through an operating referendum in 2022 that provided $5M for the current year. If state support kept up with inflation, there would be less or no need for additional operational referendums. Want to voice your thoughts? Contact your representatives!

New Board Member



The School District of Onalaska welcomes Bridget Thomas as the newest elected member of the Board of Education. Her first board meeting was on April 28, 2025, beginning her three year term. Learn more about the board under the "Staying Informed" section on page 6.

Other Hilltopper Headlines

- OHS teacher Shelby Buchanan named "Best K-12 Teacher" in Best of La Crosse County contest.
- Eagle Bluff staff Mary Schams writes and publishes children's book, "Push Restart."
- OHS senior Bodie Callaway wins Snowboard State Championship for third year in a row.
- Northern Hills PE introduces cardio drumming unit thanks to Onalaska Education Foundation and NH PTO.
- OHS senior Cam Cornett signs letter of intent to play collegiate football at Michigan Tech.

Community Donations

The district received the donations listed below from January - April 2025. These dollars allow us to continue providing the best experience for our students. We are very grateful for the community support!

- $400 from an anonymous donor for student lunch accounts
- $100 from Elke Flick for student lunch accounts
- $1,000 from Robert George for the Irving Pertzsch Multilingual Learners program
- Approx. $2,500 in food from Dahl ABRA Auto Body for the Northern Hills Elementary family reading night
- $1,852.49 from the Office Depot School Supply Drive for school needs at Northern Hills Elementary
- $750 from the St. Pat's Knights of Columbus for the ONAbility program
- $1,500 from an anonymous donor for the KidWind Club at Onalaska High School
- $31.25 from Melissa Snider for Irving Pertzsch Elementary
- $1,000 from an anonymous donor for the Northern Hills Elementary Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center trip
- Koi fish valued at $110 from Ryan Born for Eagle Bluff Elementary
- $300 from Mary Cody's Restaurant for the district food pantry
- $1,000 from the Northern Hills Elementary PTO for the 4th grade trip to Madison
- $125 from an anonymous donor for district-wide needs
- $125 from Jane Stull for Eagle Bluff Elementary
- $115 from the Rotary Club of La Crosse for the ONAbility program
- $1,000 from the Irving Pertzsch Elementary PTO for yearbooks for students
- $2,500 from the Irving Pertzsch Elementary PTO for student field trips

Staying Informed

Board of Education Meeting Schedule

Board of Education meetings are typically held on the second and fourth Mondays of each month at 6:00 p.m. in the Board of Education Room at the District Office, 237 2nd Ave S.

Regular meetings are streamed, archived, and made available to the public. For more information on our board or to view past meetings: onalaskaschools.com/school-board

Annual Notices

We want you to be informed of important policies and procedures impacting student and employee safety, responsibilities and rights. Annual notices can be found on our website: onalaskaschools.com/district/annual-notices

If you do not have internet access, you can request a written copy by contacting the Superintendent in writing at the District's address: 237 2nd Ave S., Onalaska, WI 54650

For a full list of district events, including activities and athletics, visit www.onalaskaschools.com/calendar or scan the QR code.

HILLTOPPER SNAPSHOTS

follow us on social media!



















School District of Onalaska
237 2nd Ave S
Onalaska, WI 54650

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS

President	Aaron McDonald	mcdaa@onalaskaschools.com
Vice President	Ann Garrity	garan@onalaskaschools.com
Clerk	Brian Haefs	haebr@onalaskaschools.com
Treasurer	Mark Cassellius	casma@onalaskaschools.com
Director	Erik Archer	arcer@onalaskaschools.com
Director	Tracy Laufenberg	lautr@onalaskaschools.com
Director	Bridget Thomas	thomas.bridget@onalaskaschools.com

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION - District Office: 608.781.9700

Co-Interim Superintendent	Fran Finco	finfr@onalaskaschools.com
Co-Interim Superintendent	Roger Fruit	fruro@onalaskaschools.com
Director of Finance	Janet Rosseter	rosja@onalaskaschools.com
Director of Instructional Services	Fayme Evenson	evefa@onalaskaschools.com
Director of Student Services	Laurie Enos	enola@onalaskaschools.com
Director of Human Resources	Sonya Ganther	ganso@onalaskaschools.com

Nondiscrimination and Access to Equal Educational Opportunity

The School Board is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students in the District. The Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, creed, pregnancy, martial status, parental status, sexual orientation, sex, (including transgender status, change of sex or gender identity), or physical, mental, emotional, or learning disability ("Protected Classes") in any of its student program and activities. Please refer to Policy 2260 - Nondiscrimination and Access to Equal Educational Opportunity for further information.

Employment Nondiscrimination

The School District of Onalaska is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate against applicants on the basis of age, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation, disability, citizenship status, marital status, pregnancy, national origin, handicap, creed, color, political affiliation, genetic information, ancestry, arrest or conviction record, or military service. The District encourages applications from all segments of the population.