



VOICE OF THE VALLEY

THE RIVER VALLEY LOCAL SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER - 2025 BACK-TO-SCHOOL ISSUE

River Valley Community,

It has been a busy summer at River Valley, and we are excited to share some of the projects completed, as well as some of the programs and opportunities for the coming school year. In this edition of the "Voice of the Valley" (VOTV), we wanted to highlight some of the following topics:

Bond and Permanent Improvement (PI Fund) Projects, including:

- Bond - Roof: We are pleased to inform our community that the roofing project for all four buildings is now fully complete.
- Bond - HVAC: The HVAC upgrades at Heritage Elementary, Liberty Elementary, and the Middle School are on track to be completed.
- PI Fund - Continued Parking Lot Work: We are utilizing the Permanent Improvement Fund, as part of our 15-year capital improvement plan, to ensure that all parking lots do not deteriorate into poor condition, as they did two years ago before the PI Levy was passed.

Some safety updates for the coming 2025-26 school year included:

- Seat Belts on Route Buses: Over the coming months during the 25-26 school year, all route buses will have three-point shoulder/lap belts installed.
- PA Systems: In all four buildings are being replaced.

Both projects, the Seat Belt and PA System upgrades, are projected to be completed using no local taxpayer dollars. These projects will be covered using State funds, which River Valley received called: DPIA or Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid. River Valley received these funds, in part, as a result of our participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program, which provided students with free breakfast and lunch during the 2024-25 school year.

Other updates in this VOTV include:

- Career Tech Education (CTE) - Expansion Project: The \$2.5 million grant project at the High School is nearing completion, and as of the date this was written, the CTE lab and classroom areas are projected to be finished on August 11th.
- River Valley Athletic Boosters (RVAB): Weight Room Project - As part of the CTE Expansion project, the Board approved the addition of a nearly 4,000 square foot area, and the Athletic Boosters have committed \$350,000 to pay for new weight equipment (approx. \$200K) and to finish the space (approx. \$150K). This area is expected to be completed by early to mid-October. Learn more about opportunities to assist with this project on page 8 of this issue.

Finally, during the 2025-26 school year, as we approach the 250th Anniversary of our nation's founding on July 4, 1776, River Valley will take part in a year-long "Celebrate America!" theme. Each month, staff and students will celebrate unique areas of our great nation. See more details inside this VOTV. We look forward to the start of a great school year!

Go Vikes!

Adam Wickham, Superintendent



Adam Wickham

RV Schools Superintendent



RV: Celebrates America!

A yearlong celebration of America's 250th Birthday!

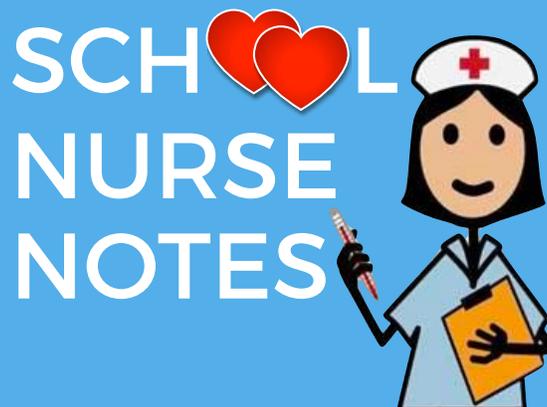
As we approach the 250th Anniversary of our nation's founding on July 4, 1776, River Valley will participate in a year-long themed celebration called "Celebrate America!" Each month, students will learn about unique aspects of our nation: from our founding documents, to the importance of agriculture in our nation, and the music and art that celebrates America.

Month	Theme
Kick-Off Aug./Sept. 2025	The 250th Anniversary of America's Founding: Our Freedoms and Government - The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, The U.S. Constitution, and The Bill of Rights
Oct. 2025	America's Food & Farms: Exploring where our food comes from and the importance of agriculture to our nation
Nov. 2025	Freedom is not Free: Honoring our Veterans and Military Service People
Dec. 2025	We the People: Exploring America's Heritage and Cultures
Jan. 2026	America's First & Originals: Innovation & Invention
Feb. 2026	America Works: Exploring Jobs & Careers
Mar. 2026	America - Fun, Music, and Art: The music, art, and games that define and celebrate America
Apr. 2026	How America Moves: A focus on transportation
May 2026	America: The Great Outdoors: Explore the nation and prepare for July 4, 2026 - America's 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776



Welcome Back!

A new school year is upon us! As we return to school for the 2025-2026 school year, we are once again reviewing vaccination records for our students. Did you know that the state requires students to have a current vaccination record or vaccination waiver on file to attend a public school? As the years pass and boosters are recommended, we need to review our records for the health and safety of our students. If you have a student entering Kindergarten, 7th grade, or 12th grade specifically, please check with your physician to be sure your child is up to date with their vaccines. Please submit an updated copy of your child's vaccination record or a vaccination waiver to the school before October 1st. We appreciate your cooperation with this matter and look forward to a safe, healthy school year.



Free Breakfast and Lunch For All Students!

River Valley will once again offer complimentary breakfast and lunch to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Just as for the 2024-25 school year, we project that this program will be covered with Food Service funds received from the Federal CEP and Summer Food programs. As a result, River Valley will be able to provide our students with both breakfast and lunch at no cost to students and their families. Some of you may be wondering how River Valley can provide our students with both breakfast and lunch for free. This is possible through the state and federal reimbursements we receive from both the CEP Program and our Summer Food Program, making this program possible without utilizing local tax dollars.

DID YOU KNOW?

Number of meals served to students during the 2024-25 school year:

- Over 139,000 Breakfasts
- Over 219,000 Lunches

Families saved approximately \$800 per student during the 2024-25 school year as a result of this CEP program.

OPEN HOUSE SCHEDULE

Stop in and meet your teacher, tour the classroom,
and drop off your school supplies.

HERITAGE & LIBERTY ELEMENTARY

Thursday, August 14, 2025

4:30 PM - 6:00 PM

HIGH SCHOOL & MIDDLE SCHOOL

Thursday, August 14, 2025

5:30 PM - 7:00 PM

www.rvk12.org

River Valley Preschool Child Find Information

Child Find screenings are offered by River Valley Local Schools as a resource to parents who have developmental concerns for their child. Children may participate in the free screening if they are a resident of River Valley Local School District and are between 3 and 5 years old. Child Find is NOT a Kindergarten screening.

The purpose of Child Find is to provide information about a child's current development in the following areas:

- Motor
- Language
- Concept
- Self-help
- Social-emotional development

The Child Find screenings are held at River Valley Liberty Elementary School. These screenings take place from September through May and are conducted by our team of special needs preschool staff. A parent must be present on site during the screening, which lasts approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Liberty Elementary School is located at 1932 Whetstone River Road N., Caledonia, OH 43314.

To schedule a Child Find preschool screening, fill out the Google questionnaire linked here: www.rvk12.org/preschool/child-find-screening



ACADEMIC UPDATE



We hope you're enjoying a slower pace, some sunshine, and special time together this summer. As we take a break from the busy school year, we wanted to reach out with a quick note of thanks and a look ahead.

This past year, we saw so much growth in our students, academically, socially, and emotionally! We are always amazed by how much they learn and how hard they work. And, of course, that growth doesn't happen without the care, encouragement, and support you provide at home, which we strive to mirror at school. Thank you for being such a key part of your child's learning.

Here at River Valley, we've been using this quieter time to reflect on what went well and what we can continue to work on for the upcoming school year. Our goal is to keep learning ways to engage every student, and we're excited about what's to come.

We're looking forward to welcoming everyone back soon, refreshed and ready for an amazing year ahead. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

To help students and parents with the first day of school, bus drivers will be in attendance for the Open House at both elementary schools. Getting to know your bus driver is a great way to smooth the transition for students from summer to the school year, alleviating stress and providing a friendly face as students return to school. Please stop by with any questions you may have.

If you have not already done so, please review our bus rules with your student and sign the acknowledgement in FinalForms. FinalForms must be completed and submitted to be added to the bus roster. If you are requesting transportation, please verify that you have completed all the sections for busing.

This year, bus routes will be posted online and will include estimated times for pick-up and drop-off. Please remind your students to be outside and waiting for the bus five minutes before its arrival.

Welcome our new substitute drivers:
Dennis Hudnell & Cynthia Rawlins

If you have any questions, please contact Trista Thorpe:
740-725-5410 or tthorpe@rvk12.org

Director of Instruction & Assessments
Don Gliebe (dgliebe@rvk12.org)

Director of K-5 Teaching & Learning
Melanie Comstock (mcomstock@rvk12.org)

New Principals at RV Elementary Schools



Mr. John Wickersham
Heritage Elementary Principal

Introducing Mr. John Wickersham

Hello! My name is John Wickersham and I am the new principal at Heritage Elementary. I have taught in the River Valley district for 16 years at various grade levels in the elementary. This will be my first year moving into an administrative role. I have also served as a baseball coach for the Vikings, and assisted with middle school athletics over the years. I graduated from Huntington University with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. I earned my Master's degree from Walden University and completed my administrative certification through Indiana Wesleyan University.

My wife, Kim, and I moved to Marion in 2009 from Northern Indiana. We have three children: Hayley will be a senior at RVHS, Hannah is going to be a freshman, and Grady is going into 7th grade. The girls are both involved in the RV volleyball program, while Grady enjoys playing football and baseball. We enjoy watching all types of sporting events plus exploring parks and communities.

I am excited to serve and continue to build upon the success we've had here at RV. It is an honor to work with the district and support the community in bringing a quality and safe education to the students. We hope you enjoy your last bit of summer, and I look forward to a great year at Heritage!

River Valley Schools

River Valley High School

740-725-5800

Travis Stout, Principal
Kyle Strzelecki, Asst. Principal

River Valley Middle School

740-725-5700

Tom Bower, Principal
Marty Schuster, Asst. Principal

Heritage Elementary School

740-725-5500

John Wickersham, Principal

Liberty Elementary School

740-725-5600

Zach Burns, Principal

See our calendar of events at:
www.rvk12.org



Mr. Zach Burns
Liberty Elementary Principal

Introducing Mr. Zach Burns

I'm thrilled to be the new principal of Liberty Elementary School! I'm excited to join a school community renowned for its exceptional academic programs, supportive families, and dedicated staff.

I've been teaching elementary school for ten years, and the past three years served as the assistant principal at Wynford Elementary. I've led initiatives in literacy, student support systems, and instructional improvement. I'm passionate about creating a positive school culture where every child feels valued, supported, and challenged to reach their full potential.

My wife, Loren, and I have two wonderful kids, and our oldest will be starting preschool at Liberty this year. I spend most of my free time with my family, whether it's going to the park, playing games, or watching a movie.

Over the next few weeks and months, I look forward to getting to know our students, families, and community members. Please don't hesitate to reach out, introduce yourself, or share your thoughts. I'm here to listen, learn, and lead in service of our students and staff.

Treasurer's Corner

As we approach the beginning of the 2025-2026 school year, we are also at the beginning of a new biennium budget at the state level. This means that the House, Senate, Conference Committee, and the Governor have recently passed the state funding that school districts across the state will receive. This new budget will cover the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 school years.

When the budget bill reached the Governor's desk, several items were included that would have had a significant negative impact on all public school districts, as well as other taxing entities across the state. Governor DeWine chose to line-item veto 67 items in the budget bill, with seven of these items being key education-related vetoes. The House reconvened on Monday, July 21st, and voted 61-28 to override Item #66, which restricts political subdivisions from pursuing certain levy types. Item #66 now advances to the Senate for consideration. Lawmakers have until December 31, 2026, to act on any remaining line-item vetoes.

As we proceed through the next several weeks and deliberations take place, we will be sure to share any information regarding these override attempts and their potential impact on our students, staff, and community. In the meantime, we must thank Governor DeWine for valuing education and looking at long-term solutions to some of the problems that we are seeing with property valuation increases across the state over the last several years rather than cutting a significant amount of school funding and creating volatility and more problems long-term for taxpayers, school districts, and other taxing entities.

In July 2021, the General Assembly passed and enacted the Fair School Funding Plan, a new funding formula to calculate the amount of state funding for all school districts in Ohio. The biennium budget bill, also known as House Bill (HB) 96, continues the phase-in of this plan to 83.33% in 2025-2026 and 100% in 2026-2027. While this funding model will continue to be used and phased in, the state unfortunately did not update the base cost data, which is used to support the cost of educating students and operating a school district.

This leaves a significant discrepancy between the cost of education and the funding we receive, even though income data and property valuations are still being updated in the formula, forcing school districts across the state to rely more heavily on their local taxpayers. The effort to continue the Fair School Funding Plan, but also include base cost updates, will be something that school districts across the state continue to advocate for as we seek an equal share of funding between the state and our taxpayers instead of that burden continuing to shift more onto our local taxpayers as it has in recent years.



Brittany Keller

RV Schools Treasurer



View more resources
from the
Business Office at:
rvk12.org/fiscal

BOND PROJECTS COMPLETION CHECKLIST



Shingle roofs replaced with standing seam metal on all school buildings.



Flat rubber roofs replaced on all school buildings.



Driveways and parking lots repaired, replaced, or sealed at all schools.



Tennis courts replaced.



HVAC systems upgraded at Heritage, Liberty, and the Middle School.

New Seatbelts Planned for All RV Buses

We are excited to announce an upcoming major safety upgrade to our transportation department. In June, the Board adopted a resolution to initiate the process during the 2025-26 school year to install seatbelts on all route buses. This will result in a three-point lap and shoulder belt (see picture for an example).

After weighing the potential impacts of implementing seat belt requirements on our transportation budget, student capacity, student safety, and operational efficiency, River Valley Superintendent, Adam Wickham, made the recommendation to the Board of Education at the June 12th Board meeting, to adopt a resolution to begin the process of installation and use of seat belts on school buses within the district. Mr. Wickham shared that the projected cost for this conversion will NOT use any local taxpayer dollars and will be covered with state dollars from Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid (DPIA) funds. The reasons for adding seat belts included the following:



- Over the past three years, the district has recorded an average of over 100 “red light runners” per year, where vehicles failed to stop once buses activated red lights and the stop sign. Unfortunately, we believe many of these incidents are due to distracted driving.
- Distracted driving leading to an increased potential of offset head-on collisions.
- Increased potential for rollovers on elevated roadways such as State Route 95, 98, and 309.
- Allows bus drivers to focus more on driving instead of dealing with students unnecessarily out of their seats.
- Finally, in 2018 and again in 2022, the National Traffic Safety Board (NTSB) renewed its recommendation that states require passenger lap and shoulder belts on new, large school buses.

The Board approved this process of converting buses will begin with all route buses during the 2025-26 school year and continue with converting trip and spare buses potentially into the 2026-27 school year. Buses that are deemed too old or with too high mileage will not have seat belts added, as they will be phased out of our substitute and trip bus fleet in the near future.



RV elementary students getting ready to participate in the recorder concert with the Central Ohio Symphony at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Middle School News

My name is Tom Bower, and I have the privilege of serving as the principal of River Valley Middle School. It's hard to believe that summer is quickly coming to a close, and soon our hallways will be filled with students, our fields active with football, our gyms alive with volleyball, and the spirit of our cheerleaders echoing throughout the campus.

As I begin my second year as head principal, I'm excited to continue our commitment to the Viking PRIDE framework, which reflects the values we strive to instill in all of our students. This year, we will remain focused on cultivating students who are Positive, Respectful, demonstrate Integrity, make a Difference, and strive for Excellence. These core values are essential to our success both inside and outside the classroom.

While we bid farewell to a few staff members who have either retired or moved on to new opportunities, we are pleased to welcome several new additions to the RVMS team:

- Zach Rogers, 6th Grade Science
- Rachel Osborne, 7th Grade ELA (replacing Karen Frericks, who transitions to a Reading Specialist role)
- Cassidy Rexrode, 7th and 8th Grade Math
- Mariah Bartlett, 8th Grade ELA
- Jessica Houser, 6th Grade Intervention Specialist
- Alyssa Newman, School Counselor (replacing Jayne Klingel)

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to our custodial team—Mr. Jim, Ms. Julie, and Ms. Cheryl—for their outstanding work over the summer. Despite numerous interruptions, they ensured the building is clean, organized, and ready to welcome students and staff. Their dedication does not go unnoticed, and we are grateful for the custodians throughout the entire River Valley School District.

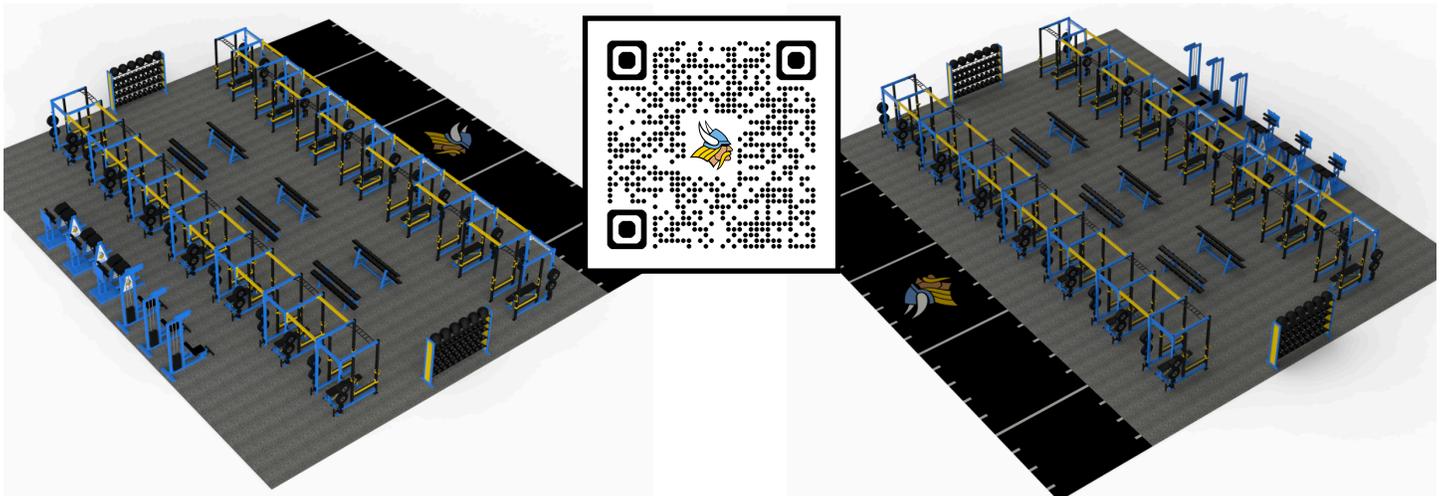
I look forward to seeing many of you and connecting as we begin the 2025–2026 school year. Please mark your calendars for our Open House on Thursday, August 14, from 5:30 to 7:00 PM.

Go Vikes!

Tom Bower - Principal, River Valley Middle School

River Valley Weight Room Addition

Since our schools were constructed, our athletic programs have struggled to have adequate space for weight training. Twice a year, the weight equipment is disassembled, moved, and reassembled between two locations as space is needed for various sports seasons. Recently, River Valley Local Schools has decided to add on to the CTE expansion project to provide space that will be dedicated as a permanent weight room where all RV teams can come to train and recover throughout the year. Now, the RV Athletic Boosters need your help to raise the funds needed to finish and outfit this space. Scan the QR code below to help make this dream a reality!



RV Athletics Introduces Digital Ticketing and Cashless Options for 2025–26



Exciting changes are coming to River Valley Athletics this year to enhance the fan experience and make access to events more convenient. Beginning this fall, all home athletic events will offer cashless entry options at the gate, along with the ability to pre-purchase tickets online. While digital and cashless options will be available, cash will still be accepted at the gate for those who prefer to pay in person.

Additionally, Family and Individual All-Sports Passes are going digital. Fans can now use their mobile device to scan their pass at the gate, eliminating the need to carry a physical card. Senior Citizen Passes for district residents will continue to be issued as traditional card passes and can be picked up in the Athletics Office at the high school.

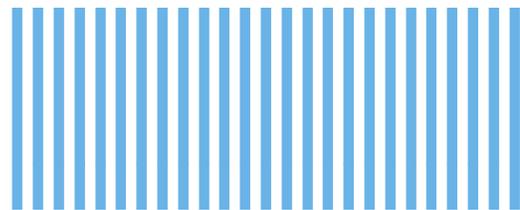
Please contact the athletics secretary, Susie Harbolt if you have any questions on Senior Citizen Passes: sharbolt@rvk12.org or 740-725-5808

Passes will be available for purchase starting August 1st. For added convenience, Family and Individual All-Sports Passes can now be purchased online, so there's no need to visit the office in person.

Stay tuned for more information coming soon from Activities Director Sage Brannon, and be sure to follow River Valley Athletics on social media for updates throughout the season.

THE 2025 VIKING BASH

Friday, August 29, 4:30 – 6:00 pm
River Valley High School Campus
(Between the Middle School and Tennis Courts)



PLUS - Kids PreK-5th Grade get a free football game ticket w/ parent ticket purchase.

Apparel Vendors, Shaved Ice, Inflatables, Activities at the RV F.A.R.M., Food Truck, and more...



FREE FOOD!

- Hot Dogs
- Chips
- Watermelon
- Bottled Water

High School News

The 2025-26 school year is fast approaching and will be another great year at River Valley High School. RVHS will conduct its Open House this year on August 14th from 5:30-7:00 PM, and all students will begin school on August 19th. As we approach these dates, there are several important changes that we would like to spend some time highlighting:

From a facilities perspective, annual parking lot updates are currently in progress, the roof project is wrapped up, and the new CTE (Career and Technical Education) expansion wing is nearing completion as well. As it currently stands, the wing is scheduled to be completed before the start of the school year. The wing will have expanded space for our ag program, construction trades program, and our healthcare program. River Valley has utilized grant funding to cover the vast majority of the project costs. The Athletic Boosters are also working with the district to furnish a new weight room that will be housed within this new addition.

River Valley's CTE department will have two new faces. Zoe Parrott joins us after teaching at Kenton High School last year. She will teach our food science courses as part of our Agriscience department, and we will also have a new allied healthcare instructor, which we plan to announce soon.

Our music department will have a new choir director. Ian Keller joins us from Bowling Green University, bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience. We will also have a new science teacher, Stephen Kraizel, who comes to us from Ohio Wesleyan University.

In our math department, a familiar face to many from middle school joins our team. Kim Robinson will be teaching both HS and MS Algebra I classes. Finally, Dan Arndt will be a new intervention specialist as he comes to us from Marion City Schools. Dan has been a coach within the district for several years, and we are excited to have him and all of our other new staff members on board.

Fall sports are getting underway. Viking Bash will take place from 4:30-6:00 PM at the first home football game on July 29th. For athletic-related questions, please contact our Activities Director, Ms. Sage Brannon - sbrannon@rvk12.org or 740-725-5806.

We will continue to offer driver's education through River Valley Schools this year. We have added another vehicle and more certified instructors. This will greatly increase our capacity within the program and our ability to serve more students.

Finally, I would like to share two pieces of information for students to consider for the upcoming school year. First, students will receive information about their schedules in early August, in advance of the Open House. Second, as you begin preparing for school supply shopping, our supply list can be found on the RV website.

As always, please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions: Travis Stout - tstout@rvk12.org or 740-725-5805.



CTE Expansion Project Nears Completion

At the beginning of March 2024, River Valley Local Schools received notification that our grant application, which was written to expand our career-technical education program spaces, had been approved. We were also incredibly surprised to learn that our application had received the full \$2.5 million requested, which was the maximum amount allowed for this CTE Equipment Grant. That notification started the ball rolling on what would be an 18-month project to design, build, and equip a new agricultural education lab, a new construction lab and classroom, and a combined lab/classroom space for our new health science pathway.

Our first hurdle was collaborating with our architect and construction team to design a space that would stay within the scope of our \$2.5 million award. The initial design for our submitted plan came in at over \$3.8 million, which would have required the school board to commit a large amount of local funds to complete this project. With some creative work from our architect and by modifying the design to incorporate a pre-engineered steel structure, we were able to develop a plan that fell within the grant budget numbers.

Once we moved to a pre-engineered steel structure for this addition, we also thought this might be a great opportunity to address a long-standing need for a new weight room space for our district. After exploring the options further, we realized that it would be very cost-effective to expand our initial plan slightly, now providing us with a weight room and an additional space that could be used for a future exercise science career-tech pathway. After discussing this with our Board of Education, they agreed that it made good financial sense to use some local funds to add this additional space, as it was cost-effective given that the construction team was already building the planned CTE addition. With this option now being a possibility, we approached our River Valley Athletic Boosters to ask if they would be willing to cover the expenses of finishing and equipping this new weight room/exercise science space, provided the district was willing to cover the construction costs. Thankfully, they also thought this was a great opportunity and agreed to cover those expenses. (Note: if you would like to make a donation to help the boosters meet this goal, see the Weigh Room article on page 8)

Once everything is completed, we will have added the following spaces for our career and technical education programs at River Valley Local Schools.

- Agribusiness & Production Systems Lab space increased from 1700 S.F. to 3000 S.F.
- Construction Lab increased from 1700 S.F. to 3000 S.F.
- Remodeled Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources Bioscience Classroom and Lab
- Remodeled Agricultural Science Classroom
- New 900 S.F. Construction Classroom
- New 1200 S.F. Health Science Lab / Classroom
- New 4000 S.F. Exercise Science / Weight Room

We are very pleased to announce that we are on schedule with an expected move-in date of August 11, just in time for the start of the 2025–26 school year. Once all the furniture is in place and the weight room is set up, we will invite everyone in to see this wonderful addition for the students of RV.

Lastly, we would like to thank the State of Ohio, the River Valley Board of Education, and the RV Athletic Boosters for funding this project. We also want to express our gratitude to our construction team led by Elford, our architect, Bradley Blumensheid, and all of the construction professionals who have made this project possible. We can't wait for all of you to see the finished space!





River Valley Local Schools Board of Education Members

PRESIDENT- DON RENGERT
VICE PRESIDENT- CHERYL BEINEKE
ROBERT STUMP
BEN ALBRIGHT
NATHAN SMITH

“There is nothing which can better deserve your patronage, than the promotion of science and literature. Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness.”

– George Washington