

Schools

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campus. In 2009, voters overwhelmingly approved a bond issue to expand and renovate Mustang High School, maintaining its roots by connecting the pieces of the 1960s campus with several new academic buildings and a commons area with seven serving lines to accommodate its current population of 3600 students. With the support of the community through future bond issues, the capacity and opportunities at MHS will continue to be expanded, while additional elementary, intermediate and middle schools will be needed to keep up with capacity and maintaining manageable class sizes.

A FOCUS ON ACADEMICS

2020 and the ensuing pandemic forced numerous changes in how schools operate, but among one of the changes was the implementation of the M.O.R.S.E.Y. Program. Mustang's Options for Reaching Students' & Educating Youth is an innovative program designed to serve students who benefit from a customized, virtual education solution.

While the district has offered online courses for years, this program provides participating students with the flexibility to complete all of their coursework outside the traditional school building or blend their learning experience by attending some classes at school. M.O.R.S.E.Y. students also have the unique opportunity to participate in on-site extracurricular activities, including 6A athletic teams and world-class fine arts programs.

This free, online education opportunity aligns with Oklahoma Academic Standards and offers a self-paced education option for K-12 students. Highly quali-

fied, certified teachers provide online instruction and work closely with students and parents to customize lessons as needed.

Even with these exciting changes, the district maintains a steady focus on its long-standing tradition of academic achievement. Mustang Public Schools was the first to implement a model of continuous improvement concerning the success of every child and not just averages across grade levels.

From the youngest students to seniors, the district is focused on a strategy to identify those who are struggling and to get them the help they need to be successful. Once a student is identified as struggling, teachers compile the relevant student's data to see exactly where the student needs help, and then they work as a team toward the goal of student success.

In fact, Mustang High School has made tremendous strides in reducing the student dropout rate. In the 2011-12 school year, MHS had state reported numbers of 97 dropouts, or 4 percent. In 2016-17, that rate had dropped to less than 1 percent (.9 percent), or 28 students, and had dropped to 22 in 2020-21 despite an enrollment of 3,434 (.6 percent).

MHS maintains an "at risk" list and dedicates one administrator to help identified students. Between the counselors and principals, they know the story behind each student and why they are struggling. Principal Dr. Kathy Knowles commented that "we continually look for ways to reach students who are not being successful in the traditional academic environment."

STEM - SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY ENGINEERING AND MATH

Mustang Schools is one of the few in the state to earn the

status as one of the Governor's STEM communities focusing on science, technology, engineering and math. The goal is to infuse STEM into all levels of learning, from STEM exploration in the elementary schools to actual scientific research classes at the secondary level. At its heart, STEM is about solving real-world problems through science, technology engineering and math.

According to the Alliance for Science & Technology Research, there were 81,000 high paying, STEM related job openings in 2018. These openings need students with a strong STEM background to fill them. According to Pew Research (2021), "STEM workers enjoy higher median earnings than those in other, non-STEM occupations. In 2019, median earnings for full-time, year-round workers ages 25 and older in a STEM job were about \$77,400. The comparable median for workers in other, non-STEM occupations was \$46,900."

For Mustang Public Schools, STEM represents teaching science and mathematical concepts through the integration of technology and engineering design. Mustang has received several STEM grants, and bond funds for STEM were approved by the voters in 2014. These funds have allowed many teachers to go to STEM training and have purchased technology and science equipment to better equip our STEM classes.

AVIATION - THE NEXT OKLAHOMA FRONTIER

There is a grass-roots aeronautics movement taking off in Oklahoma classrooms, and the aviation and aerospace industry is counting on an innovative program to reach new heights. The 4-year "You Can Fly" High School Curriculum developed by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) is being adopted by independent school districts at

a record pace across the state.

Over the last several years, the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission has led the way to advocate and implement this novel curriculum to support Oklahoma's commitment to solve workforce challenges and to ensure that the state's second-largest industry, aviation and aerospace, will continue to be a major economic driver for the state. Today, Oklahoma is ranked third in the Nation for implementing the AOPA curriculum with nearly 30 schools teaching it, and is on the heels of overtaking the lead this fall with the start of the 2022-2023 school year.

In late 2021 the Commission, as part of a statewide consortium, was awarded a Federal Aviation Administration Workforce Development Grant to further support the implementation of the AOPA program and to make Oklahoma's educators aware of the potential that aviation and aerospace have in their classrooms. One of the foundational aspects of receiving the FAA grant funding was the ability to name five Oklahoma high schools as "Aviation High Schools of Excellence."

These five schools, Ada High School, McAlester High School, Mustang High School, Okmulgee High School, and Pryor High School were all early adopters of the AOPA program and are in year three or beyond of implementing the curriculum. Because of their expertise and willingness to share their knowledge they have been designated to assist what is expected to be 50 Oklahoma high schools in the implementation of the AOPA Curriculum for next school year and will serve as hubs for aviation STEM activities and teacher professional development.

"We are very pleased to recognize these five high schools as Oklahoma Aviation High

Schools of Excellence," stated State Director of Aeronautics, Grayson Ardies. "Each of these schools has demonstrated a commitment to the implementation of strong aviation education programming, not just through high school coursework but the development of vertically aligned PreK-12 aviation programs and activities. Many in the industry have long-desired this aviation-focused, primary-level education curriculum to get students started on an early flight path to joining an aviation or aerospace career."

"We are very proud of our Aviation Program and are thrilled at being selected as an Oklahoma Aviation High School of Excellence. We simply could not offer such amazing opportunities for our students without the support of our community, and we look forward to seeing how high Mr. Knowles and our students can soar," Charles Bradley, Superintendent, Mustang Public Schools.

"In addition to these five early adopters of the AOPA program, we are seeing wonderful news elsewhere in Oklahoma to support the industry's workforce needs. The announcement of Norman Public Schools and its desire to develop an aviation and aerospace-focused high school is an amazing step forward," said Paula Kedy, who began the state's aviation education revolution while working with Ada Public Schools. Kedy is the lead source in the state regarding aviation and aerospace education at the primary school level and now represents the Aeronautics Commission as a member of its staff. "Proponents of the effort are hopeful that the AOPA curriculum, and schools that are adopting it, will create energy across the state which will enhance the industry's ability to recruit workforce talent from within Oklahoma," Kedy continued.