

PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE... (speech shared during the virtual open house)



Good evening future Patriots!

While this is my first year as the Principal at OP, the outstanding staff and community of Orchard Park is not new to me. I was a teacher at OP when I first came to HWDSB in the year 2000. I was here for over a decade learning about what a gem this high school is. I left OP on my journey to become an administrator and feel so blessed to be back in a school with an exceptional academic program, world famous robotics program, robust athletics program and a wide variety of extra curricular activities... and a one of a kind staff.

It feels like it was meant to be that I share my passion for Orchard Park with you all this evening.

Across the district many schools are doing their Grade 7/8 Open houses this week. And in many of those presentations data about how the school performs academically will be highlighted. But I know that an entire presentation on data is not why you are here. Orchard Park has an outstanding academic program that promotes all pathways. So whether your child is looking towards college, university, the workplace or an apprenticeship we have the academic programming to help them achieve their goals. We respect and honour that all students have their own goals and dreams... our job is to help them realize them. I could share that our Ontario Secondary School literary rate is 94%, and that our grade 9 math EQAO pass rate is 89%. I could also share that our graduation rate is 92%... well above the provincial and board average. But what you really want to know is that your child is not a statistic... that we will work with your child to reach their full potential. There will be a team of teachers, an administrator assigned to your child, a guidance counsellor, a student success teacher and in some cases a learning resource teacher all as part of your child's team.

We've talked a little about the programming, now let's talk about the plant. Orchard Park is a pretty easy school to navigate... so don't worry grade 8s... you won't get too lost (and even if you do, there are people here who will help you) But I'm excited to tell you about some of the improvements to the school & campus. We recently had our science labs all redone. Two million dollars was spent to give us modern science labs that foster innovation in the area of scientific learning. We have a renovated learning commons space which is the hub of the school. We also have a brand new sports field and track that are being installed as we speak. We are so excited to be able to use this field in 2 short weeks. It will allow us to practice athletics year round. It is also such a great addition for school spirit. And finally another recent addition is the installation of 33 high tech security cameras. As a parent of high school-aged students myself, safety is always on our minds as parents. You can rest assured that your children are coming to a safe learning environment.

Some of you here this evening may be wondering about the Out of Catchment (OOC) process because you don't live within the boundaries of OP. The good news is that there is a process for those in this situation. In the new year you will see information about the OOC process on the board website. There will be a form that you need to complete to make the request. This form is then dropped off at OP (with the covid restrictions there may be an electronic submission process). The forms are typically due the first week of March. As long as you make this deadline you have a very good chance of having your request approved. It is important to know that transportation is not provided for students who are applying OOC. It is extremely difficult to be accepted OOC if you miss this deadline so I encourage anyone looking to pursue this avenue to please check the website in January and February so you have all the details about the process this year.

Finally this evening I think it is important to talk about the PEOPLE of OP. This is where OP really shines. During your time at OP you will meet so many tremendous teachers. Watching OP teachers go above and beyond to support students is something I am very proud of and want to highlight. As a small example, I should mention how this week OP staff were worried about how disconnected students were feeling during this time of covid restrictions.... So they decided to create a lip sync video to the song Lean on Me to send a positive message to students.... The number of staff who stepped up to help out is just a small indication of how interested staff are in the well-being of our students. The video is available on our website if you want to check it out.

Of course teachers are also there for students academically but they also run a wide range of extra curricular programming. Some of our student council leaders are here to talk about that later this evening. Actually, I really should pause and talk about our student council. In many high schools there are no student councils this year because of Covid restrictions; however, here at OP we didn't see student council disband, instead I have watched them become more determined to find ways to connect with students. It's a special group of leaders and I hope you consider getting involved when you come next year. Speaking of amazing people, I should also take a moment to thank all the wonderful staff who are involved in this evening. While you will virtually meet some of them tonight, there are also many others behind the scenes supporting. If we were face to face I would introduce them but in this setting I will just say a big thank you to the admin team, the guidance team, our head of learning resources and our student success teacher for making tonight possible.

I really wish that we could all be physically together this evening so I could meet you all and show you around the school. OP is such a special school and I am excited for you all to get to know what a great school it is. Unfortunately, our current reality means that we can only meet virtually, but I have no doubt you will get a flavour of OP this evening. I am excited for you to meet some of the great people connected with the OP community.

Please know that I am open to answering any questions that may come up over the weeks/months to come. You can find a general OP email address on our website. Please feel free to reach out to me using that email address, or call the school. I'd love an opportunity to chat with you.

To all the future Patriots out there, I want to welcome you to the OP family ... believe it or not, you will be the Orchard Park graduating class of 2025!

K. Armstrong