



Dr. Jeff Thake, *Superintendent*
Lori Olson, *Assistant Superintendent*

Joanna Baltes, *School Board President*
Thomas Kalil, *School Board Vice President*
Sara Kasmer, *School Board Member*
Heather Wheeler, *School Board Member*
Cory Swint, *School Board Member*

News Release October 15, 2019

On Tuesday, October 15th, the Williston Public School District #1 School Board, WPSD#1 Superintendent, Williston Coyote Foundation, and Moving Forward Matters Committee held a ground-breaking ceremony for the future Innovation Academy, which will renovate an old Hagan Pool building into a school.

School Board President, Joanna Baltes, started the ceremony by welcoming and recognizing key partners in the Innovation Academy project: School Board, Moving Forward Matters Committee, Coyote Foundation Board, JE Dunn, JLG Architects, County Commissioners, Mayor Howard Klug, WPSD#1 Building Committee, administrators, staff, and parents.

President Baltes explained the history and inspiration behind the Innovation Academy. After three failed bond referendums and growing enrollment, it was time to find a new approach and prove that Williston is a community that cares about education. Once the project was announced, many generous donations were made by the members of the community. On September 6th, Equinor sponsored a free-will donation lunch, and several oil industry companies came forward and showed their support for quality education. The event raised over \$185,000 for the Innovation Academy.

Baltes continued by thanking Williston Middle School and Bakken Elementary school administrators, teachers, and students, as they are the ones who inspired everyone to dream big. She also thanked Oneok who donated \$250,000 and announced that the anchor sponsor was American State Bank, "We are thrilled to announce that American State Bank has bestowed a historic – the single largest donation in the 113-year history of ASB – in the amount of \$500,000 to the Innovation Academy." Baltes concluded by inviting everyone to a ribbon cutting ceremony in August 2020.

Codi Austreim, Executive Director of the Williston Coyote Foundation also spoke to the audience. Encompassing the "pool" aspect, she stated that this project was like a medley relay in swimming.

"Our lead off leg, the ones who got us off the starting blocks is our school board. Their leadership and passion and willingness to go above and beyond to make sure all of our students are getting the best possible education is unmatched. Under their direction, Dr. Thake and his staff have put us on a path of challenging our students to be critical thinkers and active participants in their own education. Out of this determination came the concept of the Innovation Academy!

The second leg of the race was completed by our YES Committee. Their tireless efforts to find reasonable and responsible solutions to our growing student population helped our community get behind this project. These people have put in countless hours behind the scenes to ensure that our kids get the best we have to offer!

The third leg of the relay race was accomplished by the Coyote Foundation board for agreeing to facilitate the fundraising efforts for the Innovation Academy. They saw the vision that our school board and Dr. Thake has for our students, and they gave their blessing for our foundation to help raise the necessary funds to make a big splash in education in Williston! Without them, the project would have had to swim against the current!

And last but certainly not least, our anchor leg! The ones who brought us home and touched the wall — all of you — our donors. Because of the unique challenges our community faces, it has been difficult to even keep our collective heads above water. Your generous donations have offered our district and thereby our students a life-line!!”

All donors to the Innovation Academy were recognized with a symbolic diploma or mortarboard for their generosity. The total donation amount was \$1,788,401. The Innovation Academy will open in August 2020, and will house 400 students, grades 5-8.

Deja Brew donated coffee, hot chocolate, and cider for the event. Go Go Donuts provided donuts. JE Dunn also created an Augmented Reality App, where users could see what the space would look like upon completion.