

In Session with the “Oriole” Superintendent

By, William Barnes, Principal Charlotte High School

Charlotte High School Proud of Agricultural Roots

Charlotte High School is increasingly becoming known locally and across the state for its programs designed to help students prepare for life after high school. One of the oldest and most recognizable pieces of this driving philosophy is the Charlotte High School Agri-Science program. CHS is home to Michigan’s oldest, and one of the most well-known and well respected, Future Farmers of America chapter. Each year 12-15 FFA members have Supervised Agriculture Experience projects, showing pigs that are housed in the current agriculture facility. These swine projects help students earn money, gain real life experience, and allow them to be eligible for articulated credit at Michigan State University. In addition, the agriculture program raises chickens, strawberries, lettuce, and a host of other food and floral products, creating real world experiences for over 300 CHS students per year.

According to Michigan Farm Bureau, the food and agriculture industry contributes \$101.2 billion annually to the state’s economy, and Michigan is home to 2,166 licensed food processors. This generates nearly \$25 billion in economic activity, making Michigan 19th in the nation for food processing. 923,000 people in Michigan are employed in agriculture, food processing, and related businesses, which is 22 percent of the state’s workforce. Because of the support of the Charlotte community and the work of CHS’s agriculture teachers, students in the agriculture program at CHS are in a position to enter into those fields and access those opportunities.

However, the agriculture industry, and its role in food production, is modern and technical, and CHS’s current facilities are not adequate to provide a 21st century learning experience for the students. Many of the pigs students are raising are being housed in homemade pens in order to accommodate as many as possible. Student experiences are limited by the space available. Instructors are teaching kids botany, zoology, and agriculture mechanics using state of the art methods and tools, but they are doing so in mid 20th century classrooms and a converted machine shed instead of in modern agricultural learning spaces.

In order to help upgrade these facilities to match the needs of industry, Charlotte Public Schools has included updates to the agriculture classrooms and the building of a new agricultural science pavilion in the upcoming November 6th bond proposal. These additions will replace these outdated spaces, and ensure that students will learn cutting edge, modern food production skills in equally cutting edge and modern spaces. This includes more hands on experience with current industry technology, as well as modern teaching amenities that will allow instructors to create more experiences in the barn with animals and plants rather than with simulations in the classroom. All of this will happen with better controlled biosecurity, which is designed into the new facility, thereby increasing safety for students and the animals with which they will be working.

With the proposed changes, the students would not only have access to modern teaching and learning facilities, but also amenities such as a classroom/training room, bathrooms and larger facilities. The agriculture program could work with community organizations more easily, such as 4-H, to host events that benefit more than just CHS students. The ability to offer a facility to host

showmanship workshops, feeding seminars, livestock judging workouts, or industry trainings or meetings would create a better connection between the program and other stakeholders, thereby benefiting the entire the agriculture community.

Charlotte is proud of its agriculture roots, and the proposed facility and classroom upgrades are purposefully designed to ensure that the students in the CHS agriculture program are prepared to meet the needs of the modern agriculture industry, thereby solidifying its role as an industry leader for years to come.