

# Cougar Connect

December 6, 2024

## A Note From Mrs. McDonald



### A Note From Mrs. McDonald

Dear Families,

I hope you enjoyed a great Thanksgiving break with those most dear to you.

This was a fast, learning-filled week for students. Additionally, the staff engaged collaboratively this morning, working to enhance classroom interventions and staff collaboration. Thank you, families, for supporting our valuable time to expand our capacity

for your children.

I hope this weekend brings you warmth and relaxation--make it a great one, families.

Kindly,  
Erica McDonald  
Principal

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## Save-the-Date



### Save-the-Date

#### December

**Monday, December 9-Friday, December 13:** Penny Wars StuCo

**Wednesday, December 11:** Choir Concert; 6:00-7:00 PM

**Monday, December 16-Friday, December 20:** Five Days of Celebration Spirit Week

**Wednesday, December 18:** DEI Council Meeting; 4:00-5:00 PM

**Friday, December 20:** Jingle Bell Assembly; 10:00-10:45 AM | Half Day Dismissal; 11:45 AM | End of Quarter 2 | End of First Semester

**Monday, December 23-Tuesday, December 31:** No School | Winter Break

The PTO is already in full swing for the year ahead. Follow these simple steps to ensure you don't miss any of the fun!

[otepto.org](http://otepto.org)

## DEI Spotlight

### ☆☆ DEI Spotlight ☆☆

Dear families,

Did you know that Overland Trail Elementary (OTE) is one of the most culturally diverse schools in the Blue Valley School District? This attribute makes OTE a special place and something we want to celebrate more. We are excited to build a parent and student community that reflects our student and family population. Being inclusive and bringing together community members from different backgrounds and experiences is critical to accomplish the goals set.

Do you have insight to contribute? All students, parents and guardians are invited to be members of the Overland Trail Elementary DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Council, which includes parents, caregivers, staff, and students. We welcome you to participate, even if your English is not as strong as you would prefer. You can join the warm community by listening, providing input, and planning ways to support Overland Trail Elementary's inclusive efforts.

Our next DEI Council Meeting will take place on **Wednesday, December 18th from 4:00-5:00 PM**. Please complete the following form, if you are interested in attending the next meeting with your child. Thank you for helping us celebrate the fantastic Overland Trail Elementary community.

## Community Celebrations and Observances



**Community Celebrations and Observances** - to promote awareness and appreciation of our Blue Valley families.

Some December Celebrations & Observances:

- **Universal Human Rights Month** - people all across the globe are encouraged to come together and stand up for equality, justice, and the dignity of all humans.
- **International Day of People with Disabilities** - December 3 - a day to celebrate the achievements and contributions of people with disabilities, promote an understanding of disability issues, and mobilize support for the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of people with disabilities.
- **Hanukkah** - evening of December 7 - evening of December 15 - an eight-day Jewish festival of lights. Some Jewish families will celebrate by lighting a Menorah and eating foods cooked in oil.
- **Christmas** - December 25- a Christian holiday commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ. Some Christian families will celebrate by attending church services and exchanging gifts.
- **Kwanzaa** - December 26 - January 1 - a seven-day African-American holiday celebrating culture, family, and community. For some, celebrations may include song, dance, storytelling, and a large traditional meal.

OTE | PTO



PTO Events | November

# \*Holiday\* SUPPORT A COUGAR

Our holiday Support-A-Cougar drive is back! The Support-A-Cougar program partners with OTE administration to support students in need throughout the year. Our annual holiday drive allows us to provide OTE families with gift cards, new games and books during the holiday season. We need your help to make this possible!

## \*\*WAYS TO DONATE\*\* 11/18- 12/6

\*Bring new games and books to school and place in the collection bins

\*Donate through the PTO Site via the QR code  
Log-In and select your donation level

\*Send cash or check in an envelope marked "Support-a-Cougar" and have your student give to their teacher

The Support-a-Cougar Committee will work with our school counselor and social worker to purchase gift cards and distribute the donations to families in our OTE community. If you are an OTE family in need of support for the holidays, please contact the OTE Social Worker, Lacey Koester - [lkoester@bluevalleyk12.org](mailto:lkoester@bluevalleyk12.org)



DEADLINE TO DONATE  
**12/6/24**



QUESTIONS? SUPPORT-A-COUGAR CHAIRS:

Tara Adams - [tara.adams6@gmail.com](mailto:tara.adams6@gmail.com)

Sarah Cullor - [sarah@cullor.com](mailto:sarah@cullor.com)

## Support a Cougar Holiday Drive – Spread Joy This Season!

Support a Cougar is a PTO-led program that helps OTE Cougars in need throughout the year, and our annual Holiday Drive is a special way to make the season brighter for families in our community. Through your generosity, we provide gifts and financial support during the holidays with donations of Target gift cards, new books, and games.



### Here's how you can help:

- **Financial Contributions** – Choose a donation level and submit your payment directly on our website. [Donate by clicking here.](#)
- **New Books and Games** – Drop off your donations in the collection bins at OTE starting November 18th.

**Donation deadline is December 6th.** Thank you for helping us make the holidays a little brighter for our OTE community.

If you are an OTE family in need of support this holiday season, please reach out to the OTE Social Worker, Lacey Koester - [lkoester@bluevalleyk12.org](mailto:lkoester@bluevalleyk12.org)

## Upload your pictures for the Yearbook!

Your picture uploads throughout the year make the yearbook extra special. Please use the link below to upload pictures from school events, class parties, extracurricular activities, etc. Be sure to choose a folder for your pictures to help us keep them organized. Only the PTO will be able to see and access the photos you share. [Click here to upload pictures from the Carnival and other events!](#)



## PTO Calendar of Events

For a complete list of all upcoming PTO events, visit [Overland Trail Elementary PTO - Upcoming Events \(otepto.org\)](https://www.otepto.org).

## Penny Wars StuCo | December 9-13

### Penny Wars StuCo | December 9-13

StuCo is hosting our annual Penny Wars competition next week (December 9-13). Put your spare change toward a great cause. All proceeds from our Penny War fundraiser will go directly to our OTE Support a Cougar program.



#### Here's how it works:

- Two containers will be placed in each classroom - one for pennies and one for all other silver coins.
- Each **silver coin is worth the point total of that coin**—for example, a quarter is 25 points.
- **Pennies count as negative points your OPPOSING grade level.** In other words, dropping 40 pennies into the penny container takes 40 points from another grade levels total—so save up those pennies!

#### Competing Grade Levels:

Kindergarten vs. First Grade  
Second Grade vs. Third Grade  
Fourth Grade vs. Fifth Grade

At the end of the day on December 13th, all change/points will be tallied. **The winning grade level will be announced on Monday, December 16th on the morning news show and earn an EXTRA GRADE LEVEL RECESS!**

Thank you,  
Emily Moore  
Miika Schooley

## Five Days of Celebration | Spirit Week: December 16-20



## Important Travel Outside of the USA Information

### Important Travel Outside of the USA Information

This important message is for any family or staff that will travel out of the United States during the school year. Please [click here](#) to read the restrictions and recommendations for Out of the Country travel. Blue Valley resources such as Canvas, Classlink, and school email are not accessible out of the country unless you have a personal device with a VPN on it.

## Civility Policy

### Civility Policy

We are thankful for the ongoing partnership and support we experience in our school community. Working together we ensure the best possible student experience allowing them to realize personal success. There are times, however, when issues arise which require our continued collaboration to resolve. Families may utilize the matrix linked on [the district website](#) to best address questions and concerns that may arise throughout the course of a school year. Finally, all staff and visitors should conduct their business free from intimidation, harassment, or bullying. The district's Board of Education states expectations regarding civility within [Policy 6341](#). Again, thank you for your partnership in helping to maintain a safe school community environment for all.

# Teacher Collaboration Days

## Teacher Collaboration Days

As we kick off the 2024-25 school year, I want to remind families about the teacher professional collaboration days designed for teacher plan and collaboration time. These eight days, which occur throughout the school year, are non-student attendance days for K-5 students. These days are vital to ensure the best possible preparation for our elementary students and key to quality teacher retention.

The following days, which can be found in the [2024-25 calendar](#) on the district website, have been designated as teacher professional collaboration days:

- August 30
- September 27
- November 1
- December 6
- January 31
- February 28
- April 11
- May 2

Reminder: November 1st is a K-5 non-student attendance day for teacher collaboration time. During this time, elementary educators will be in their buildings and classrooms working to ensure the best possible preparation for our elementary students and supporting student learning outcomes.

School will be back in session on November 2nd.

## Nut-Safer Guidelines



Nut Safer List 24-25

### Nut-Safer Guidelines

At OTE, we have a wide variety of food allergens and restrictions. To remain safe and to prevent exclusion, we don't accept food, including items from the Nut-Safe List, to serve in school or send home with students for birthday celebrations. This complies with our **non-edible birthday celebration**. Essentially, we must remember that sending food home is a risk for children as they transition between school and home, putting our families in an undesirable position when they cannot eat what is provided.

Blue Valley (BV) School's Nut Safer Guidelines for daily snacks will be implemented throughout the school year.

- Classroom snacks must be from the Nut Safer list.
- Nut Safer seating is available in the café during lunch.

We appreciate your support as we work to be more preventative with food safety measures to enhance student and staff safety.

The complete **Nut Safer Foods** and BV Guidelines can be found [here](#).

## Helpful Links

[School Supply Lists](#)

[District Calendar \(2024-2025\)](#)

[Overland Trail Elementary's Homepage](#)

[Family Handbook](#)



### **Erica McDonald, Principal**

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**Phone:** (913) 239-7000

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### **Alicia Anderson, Assistant Principal**

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**Location:** [6335 West 135th Street, Overland Park, KS, USA](#)

**Phone:** (913) 239-7000

**Twitter:** [@OTEAnderson](https://twitter.com/OTEAnderson)

### **Office Staff**

- Robin Warren, Administration Assistant/Bookkeeper
- Yolonda Merritt, Administration Assistant/Registrar





- Debby Alexander, Attendance

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**Erica McDonald**

Erica is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters