

# Cougar Connect

November 22, 2024

## A Note From Mrs. McDonald



### A Note From Mrs. McDonald

Dear Families,

PTO, we appreciate your support and love shown through the generous lunch for American Education Week. Our hearts are filled with joy as we embark on this holiday break. Thank you, Robin Snider, and the Staff Appreciation Committee, for your time and contribution—we appreciate you.

During this time of Thanksgiving, I want to share my gratitude and thank you for being such an important part of our students' lives. This is a wonderful time of the year to get together with friends and family to celebrate and be thankful for all the wonderful people in *our* lives. On behalf of Overland Trail Elementary, I thank you for your continued support and wish you all a safe and happy celebratory week. We will see everyone back here on Monday, December 2.

Happy Thanksgiving, families. 🦃

Kindly,  
Erica McDonald  
Principal

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## Save-the-Date



### Save-the-Date

#### November

**Monday, November 25-Friday, November 29:** Thanksgiving Break

#### December

**Thursday, December 5:** Support-A-Cougar Donations Due

**Friday, December 6:** No School | Teacher Professional Collaboration

**Friday, December 6:** PTO Holiday Lunch

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

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

**Friday, December 20:** Jingle Bell Assembly; 10:15 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 ☆☆

Are you interested in joining OTE's DEI Council? If so, please submit your contact information here:

[DEI Council](#) | [Family Interest](#).



May your  
*Thanksgiving*  
be full of peace, love, and joy.

## Community Celebrations and Observances



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

Some November Celebrations & Observances:

- **Native American Heritage Month** - celebrates the rich and diverse cultures, traditions, histories, and ongoing contributions of Indigenous peoples.
- **Military Family Appreciation Month** - honors the military family by recognizing their sacrifices and commitments.
- **Day of the Dead** - November 1 - celebrated by some with Mexican heritage, a joyful time to remember and honor deceased loved ones.
- **All Saints Day** - November 1 - celebrated by some of the Christian faith, this solemn, holy day honors the saints of the church.
- **Diwali** - November 12-16 - the festival of lights celebrates the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and the human ability to overcome observed by some Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, and others. Some will decorate their homes with lights and rangoli art, exchange gifts, dress in colorful clothing, feast with family, and/or go to temple.



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

 This section features a QR code in a red-bordered square on the left. To its right is a cluster of colorful gift boxes with various patterns and ribbons. Below the QR code is a red box with white text. At the bottom right of this section is a grey box with contact information.
 

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

**QUESTIONS? SUPPORT-A-COUGAR CHAIRS:**  
 Tara Adams - tara.adams6@gmail.com  
 Sarah Cullor - 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 \(otepto.org\)](http://Overland Trail Elementary PTO - Upcoming Events (otepto.org)).

## 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.

## Attendance Matters: Addressing School Avoidance

### Attendance Matters: Addressing School Avoidance

For some elementary students, the thought of staying home from school can be tempting, especially when faced with challenges like tests, social situations or new routines. While staying home may seem like an easy solution, avoiding school can create more stress as students miss out on key lessons, activities and social interactions.

If your child is hesitant about going to school or is frequently asking to stay home, it's important to address the issue early. Open communication between families and the school can help identify the reasons behind school avoidance and develop strategies to support your child. Whether it's a fear of a certain subject or anxiety, working together can help your child feel more comfortable and confident about attending school.

# BV Unmuted Podcast Episode: Why Attendance Matters

## BV Unmuted Podcast Episode: Why Attendance Matters

In the latest Blue Valley Schools' BV Unmuted podcast episode, Superintendent Dr. Tonya Merrigan is joined by Leah Vomhof (Blue Valley Northwest principal), Stacey Sperry (Prairie Star Elementary principal) and Dr. Cory Cox (Blue Valley North assistant principal) to discuss the importance of school attendance.



To listen to the podcast episode, visit

<https://tinyurl.com/AttendanceBV>.

## 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](#)



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## 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