

# Cougar Connect

August 15, 2025



## A Note From Mrs. McDonald

Dear Families,

What an awesome first week back. The energy around the building has been incredible—smiling faces, laughter in the hallways, pods, and classrooms, and kids excited to be back with their teachers and friends. We couldn't have asked for a better start.

Thank you for all the support at home—making sure backpacks were ready, encouraging your kids, and helping everyone get back into the school groove. It makes a huge difference, and we feel the partnership. Please keep an eye on the informal communication we share—like updates on Canvas and the work your child brings home. These are great ways to stay in the loop about how your child is doing both academically and socially-emotionally. Looking at those together can help spark questions and give us more ways to partner with you between now and conference time.

We're thrilled to kick off this school year with so much positivity. If this week is any sign of what's ahead, it's going to be an amazing year.

Don't forget to read the newsletter below about Specials (i.e., Art, Physical Education, Music, Spanish, and Computer) at Overland Trail Elementary. Have a great weekend and thank you for being part of our school family.

With Cougar pride,  
Erica McDonald  
Principal

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## Save-the-Date



### August

**Thursday, August 21:** Back-to-School Night | Session 1: 5:00-5:40 PM | Session 2: 5:50-6:30 PM

**Friday, August 22:** Skate Party

**Thursday, August 28:** Blue Valley Education Foundation Community Breakfast

**Friday, August 29:** No School | Teacher Professional Collaboration

### September

**Monday, September 1:** No School | Labor Day

**Tuesday, September 2:** No School | Professional Learning

**Wednesday, September 10:** Community Service\*

**Friday, September 12:** Birthday Book Lunch (August, September, October birthdays)

**Monday, September 15:** PTO Board Meeting; 5:30 PM-6:30 PM

**Tuesday, September 16:** First Grade Field Trip (Schwabauer) | Wilderness Science Center

**Thursday, September 18:** First Grade Field Trip (Schnegelberger) | Wilderness Science Center

**Friday, September 19:** First Grade Field Trip (Her, Swearingin) | Wilderness Science Center

**Friday, September 19:** School Pictures

**Friday, September 26:** No School | Teacher Professional Collaboration

## Nurse's Note

### Fever & Vomit Blue Valley Policy Reminder

As a reminder as we begin the new school year, students who have had a fever, vomited or had diarrhea at home must remain out of school for a full 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications. If your student develops a fever, vomits or has diarrhea during the school day, you will be contacted to pick up your student. This policy is in place to help prevent the spread of illness to other students in our school. Thank you for helping to keep our OTE community healthy!

### ✨ Unity Squad ✨

### Blue Valley's Community Board Advisory Committee

#### COMMITTEE PURPOSE

- Committee members will learn about the district's communication strategies, family engagement efforts, and approaches to well-being and school culture, then provide input on how the district connects with students, families and the broader community. Focus areas include student and staff well-being, relationships, trust and belonging. The committee supports a strong school culture and promotes environments where everyone feels valued and supported.



#### STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

- Fostering supportive and healthy school communities – by promoting mental health, safety and a sense of belonging.
- Empowering exemplary educators and staff – by supporting a collaborative school culture where all staff can thrive.
- Meetings are held in the Board of Education Room at the Blue Valley District Office, located at 15020 Metcalf Avenue, Overland Park, KS 66223, from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Please visit <https://www.bluevalleyk12.org/Page/36364> for more information.

## Parent-Teacher Organization | PTO



We're kicking off an exciting year and hope you'll join us at our first PTO Board Meeting on *Monday, August 18 at 5:30 PM* in the OTE Library. New this year, our monthly meetings will be held on Mondays at 5:30 PM to make it easier for parents and staff to attend. We'll discuss upcoming events, budget updates, and more—and we'd love to see you there!

## Mark Your Calendar

- 🍷 **Freddy's Restaurant Night** – *Monday, August 18, 4–8 PM*  
Take the night off from cooking! Dine at Freddy's and a portion of sales will benefit OTE.
- 🛼 **Back to School Skate Party** – *Friday, August 22, 5–7 PM @ Skate City Overland Park*  
\$7 admission, \$2 skate rental, and an \$11 large pizza special. Grab your friends and roll into the new school year!

## Room Parents & Classroom Celebrations

We've made some exciting updates to improve clarity, consistency, and ease for Room Parents and families:

- **New Donation Process:** All classroom celebration funds will now be collected **online through the PTO website by grade level**, rather than through individual Room Parents. This provides greater transparency and consistency, automatic receipts for families, an audit trail for accountability, and relief from the awkwardness of sending money to personal Venmo accounts.
- **Room Parents No Longer Handle Money:** You can focus on building community and helping in the classroom—we'll handle the funds!
- **Celebration Consistency:** All snacks and activities will be pre-planned and consistent across each grade. The PTO will purchase materials in bulk and distribute them to classrooms.
- **Streamlined Room Parent Sign-Ups:** Families will sign up via the PTO website. Sign-ups go live on *Friday, August 22 at 12:00 PM CST* and are first-come, first-served. Each class will be limited to two Room Parents.

Find all the details at [www.otepto.org/room-parents](http://www.otepto.org/room-parents).

## Yearbooks

Yearbooks for the 25–26 school year are only available for purchase at [otepto.org/yearbook](http://otepto.org/yearbook). OTE yearbooks are no longer purchased through ParentVue. Yearbooks can be purchased at any time throughout the school year! Parents can also upload photos to be used in the yearbook anytime at [otepto.org/upload](http://otepto.org/upload).

## Birthday Marquee

Make your child's birthday month extra special with their name in lights on the OTE Birthday Marquee! Limited spots remain for this school year—purchase at [otepto.org/birthdaymarquee](http://otepto.org/birthdaymarquee).

## Welcome to OTE | Gina Avita, Occupational Therapist



# Welcome to OTE!



*Gina Avita*

**Schooling:** I attended Bishop Miege High School. I went to K-State and earned my degree in Human Development and Family Science in 2018. In 2022, I graduated from Midwestern University in Downers Grove, IL, with my Doctorate in Occupational Therapy.

**Number of Years Working in Schools:** I started working as an OT in Blue Valley in August 2022.

I've worked at Wolf Springs and Blue Valley West for the past 3 years. I'm excited to be a part of the OTE team. I'll split my time between OTE and BVW this year!

**Role at OTE:** Occupational Therapist

**Fun Fact about Me:** I was born on Friday the 13th, and I'm a big Swiftie!



Celebrating Our Story

## Greetings From Ms. Harsch, Counselor

Hello Overland Trail Elementary! I hope you all had an enjoyable and relaxing summer. I am so excited to welcome back our students and community members. For all new families, OTE is a wonderful place to be! I believe in working together to make sure your child is safe, happy, and successful! I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to all of you.

My name is Emily Harsch, and this is my 4th year as school counselor at OTE! I am from Leawood, Kansas and graduated from K-State with a degree in elementary education. I taught first grade for nine years before completing my masters in counseling from Fort Hays State. This is my 13th year in the Blue Valley School District. I am married and have one child, a little boy named Hank! He will be two on October 1st!



My job, as the school counselor, is to advocate for ALL students. Our comprehensive program consists of a wide range of services and activities; this includes individual and group counseling, parent and teacher consultation, teaching classroom lessons, information services, and referral assistance to other programs and services in the community. I am looking forward to continuing my work with all of you and getting to know our new OTE students and families!

I am here to help you and your child(ren), please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns throughout the year.

Sincerely

Emily Harsch

OTE School Counselor

[eharsch@bluevalleyk12.org](mailto:eharsch@bluevalleyk12.org)

913-239-7017

## OTE Specials | Newsletter

### OTE Specials | Newsletter

## Understanding Payments in Blue Valley

Blue Valley Schools uses several secure systems to manage school-related payments. Each system the district uses is designed for a specific purpose and specific items or fees. This [quick guide](#) can be found on the BV Website to provide guidance for making payments.

## 2025-26 BV Calendar Change

We would like to share a change in the Blue Valley calendar for this school year that will impact Blue Valley staff and families of kindergarten students. Please note that the 2026 Kindergarten Kick-off has been rescheduled. The new date for this event is Friday, April 17, 2026. On this day, current kindergarten students will not attend school as we welcome and introduce the school to our incoming students and their families. To view the 2025-26 calendar, please visit [www.bluevalleyk12.org/calendar](http://www.bluevalleyk12.org/calendar).

## Securly Home: Partnering for Your Child's Online Safety

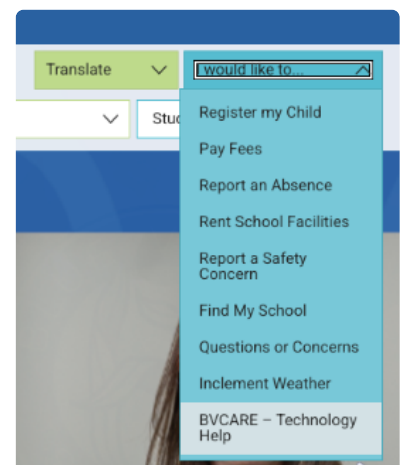
Securly is the leading solution in keeping children safe online at school. Now parents can get the same peace of mind when school devices come home. See your child's online activity in real-time and catch up with our weekly email snapshots.

Eligibility: Only for parents listed as "Lives With & Edu Rights" in Synergy.

Take an active role in your child's digital safety with Securly Home, the district's cloud-based filtering system.

### Key Features

- Monitor & Customize Filters: Use the Securly Home Parent Portal app ([Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play](#)) to monitor and adjust filters on district devices used outside the BV Network. Available for families with district-issued Chromebooks/MacBooks.



- Self-Harm Alerts: Receive mobile push notifications if your child searches self-harm content on district devices.
- Pause Internet Access: Temporarily disable internet access on your child's district device outside the school network.
- Weekly Activity Reports: Get weekly email summaries of your child's online activity (reports show all online activity after they leave the school network. Unsubscribe anytime.

#### Setup Tips

- Accounts are linked to the email in "email line #1" in ParentVUE.
- Need help updating your email in ParentVUE? Contact your school's front office.
- For setup support, submit a BV Care ticket via the BVSD website.

Note: Parent Custom Filters apply only when devices are not connected to the BV Network. Once reconnected, district filters resume.

📖 Learn more: <https://www.bluevalleyk12.org/securly> or <https://www.securly.com/home-parent>

📧 Support: [help@securly.com](mailto:help@securly.com) | <https://support.securly.com>

## Motorized Scooters and Electric Bikes

With more students using motorized scooters and electric bikes to get to school, safety concerns, traffic disruptions and property damage have increased, especially during arrival, dismissal and after-school hours. These devices can help busy families, but they must be used responsibly to protect all students and our taxpayer-funded school facilities.

We understand these devices can be a helpful option for families juggling busy schedules or navigating limited transportation options. To support a safe and consistent experience districtwide, the following expectations are in place beginning this school year:

- Riders must turn off the motor, dismount and walk devices once on school property, including sidewalks, parking lots and playgrounds.
- Students who operate motorized scooters or bikes on district property will be required to complete a [Student Permit Agreement](#) and have it signed by a parent or guardian. Upon submitting the permit, the student will be issued a sticker to display on their device. There is no cost for the permit.
- Riders may not re-engage motors until they have exited campus.
- Compliance with all [traffic laws](#) is expected.
- Devices must be locked in designated areas and not used during the school day.

We value our partnership with families in reinforcing safe habits. For helpful guidance, visit [Children's Mercy](#). Thank you for partnering with us to keep students safe and our campuses welcoming and secure.

## Electronic Device/Cell Phone Policy

Student personal electronic devices (PEDs) are to be silenced and stowed away at all times.

- If a student needs to contact their family during the school day, they can use either the main office or classroom phone, with permission.
- If family members need to reach their child, they should call the main office phone.

# Traffic and Safety Message for Families

- **Drop-off/Pick-Up:** Please [click here](#) to review our school carline map and expectations for all families. Remember, it will take a few days for our carline to run smoothly. Therefore, we appreciate your patience as we help everyone learn the process and retrain our school community as we start the school year.
- **Crossing Guards:** Through our partnership with the city of Overland Park, our community will have a crossing guard at the intersection of 133rd Street and Lamar Ave. Students and families should plan to follow the crossing guard's guidance for how/when to cross the intersection.
- **School Zone:** Please use extra care when driving in school zones and follow the recommended speed limit.
- **Parking:** Visitors to our building should park in the main parking lot utilizing the visitor parking spaces. Please note, crosswalks are closed during the drop off and pick up times and we ask visitors coming during these times to park in the south parking lot nearest the playground.
- **Buzz-in Entry:** Visitors should come to the front of the school to acquire access during the school day. At the front entrance, visitors will press the buzzer, show a government issued photo identification and state the purpose for their visit each time they visit the school. We ask that guests do not hold the door open for another visitor once you have been buzzed in. Instead, allow the door to close for each visitor to go through the procedures. Thank you for your support of our safety procedures.

## Attendance Messages



At Overland Trail Elementary, we realize that students may occasionally need to miss school for planned absences, illnesses and appointments. However, when a student does not arrive at school or unexpectedly misses a portion of the school day, we are concerned and want to make sure you are aware that your child is absent.

Beginning Thursday, August 14, families will be notified of unexpected absences through email, phone, text and optional push notifications. Overland Trail Elementary families can expect automated attendance messages by email, phone and text at 9:35 AM. If a child is absent and his/her absence has not already been reported by a parent/guardian. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to call the school to report an absence or reply to the automated email or phone message. Please call the Overland Trail Elementary attendance line at 913-239-7005 or email the attendance line at [attendanceOTE@bluevalleyk12.org](mailto:attendanceOTE@bluevalleyk12.org). Please include your child's name, first and last, grade level, classroom teacher, and reason for the absence. If leaving a message, please make sure you speak slowly and clearly. It is always helpful to repeat the information as well. The Blue Valley School District has amended the district's attendance policy (Board Policy 3200).

**Students will be permitted seven excused absences during the school year for family emergencies, vacations, and personal business.** Send a note to the teacher and the office if your child is on vacation. Separate letters should be written for each child.

Families who would also like a push notification can download the ParentVUE app and manage their notifications. If a child has an unreported absence when a teacher submits attendance, then a push notification will immediately be sent to the parent/guardian's mobile device.

### Guide to elementary school attendance messages

- 9:35 a.m.**  **Automated Attendance Message**  
Families will receive automated attendance messages via email, phone and text message at 9:35 a.m. If a child is absent and his/her absence has not been reported by a parent/guardian. Forgot to report an absence? No worries, reply directly to the phone call or email.
- Optional**  **Push Notifications**  
Families who would also like a push notification can download the ParentVUE app and manage their notifications. If a child has an unreported absence when a teacher submits attendance, then a push notification will immediately be sent to the parent/guardian's mobile device.



Interested in push notifications? Simply download the ParentVUE app ([iTunes app store](#) or [Google Play](#)),

## Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

### Arrival Procedures:

1. **Our school doors open at 8:25 AM.** Children should not arrive before 8:25 AM.
2. School begins at 8:40 AM. After 8:40 AM, students are considered tardy. A parent or guardian must come to the school's front entrance with their photo id to have their child signed in if they arrive at school later than 8:40 AM.
3. The crosswalk will be closed starting at 8:25 AM. If your student needs extra assistance, park in the parking lot closest to the playground. Do not park in the main parking lot.
4. Students should remain buckled in their seats until the vehicle stops in the traffic loop.
5. Cell phones should not be used while in the traffic loop.
6. **Drivers in the car line will need to always drive completely to the front to ensure the car line is a fluid and efficient process for student arrival.** Vehicles in the traffic loop will have the right of way and will be given priority over families walking or going to the parking lot.

### Dismissal Procedures:

1. **Dismissal begins at 3:35 PM.** Our goal is to complete dismissal by 4:00 PM.
2. Students who walk home will exit the building through the exit doors on the North side of the building.
3. Students who walk home cannot stay on the OTE campus. Y-Care utilizes the building and playground after school, Monday-Friday.
4. **Car line drivers may not be in the car line sooner than 3:00 PM to avoid conflicting with the middle school traffic.**

## PickUp Patrol | Dismissal Information

Please look forward to an invitation to PickUp Patrol (PUP) at the start of the new school year this August. This platform enables us to manage dismissal for the various ways students leave school daily. PUP eliminates the need to write notes or make phone calls when changing your student's dismissal plans. Please click the link below for more information about what to expect this school year.



See PickUp Patrol in Action - Overview



SEE PICKUP PATROL IN ACTION

## Durham Bus Services



If you wish for your child to be a bus rider, please visit the bus website to sign them up: [Durham Bus Services](#). Please note, the last day to register students for transportation on the first day of school was July 21, 2025. You can also sign up for text message alerts for your student's bus.

## Café (Cafeteria)

The breakfast and lunch menus for Overland Trail Elementary can be found online [here](#) or by downloading the Nutrislice app, which allows easy access to daily and weekly menus right from your device.

We are excited to welcome lunchroom visitors again this year, beginning **Wednesday, September 3**, after Labor Day. During the first few weeks of school, we will focus on practicing café routines and procedures to ensure a smooth experience for all students.

As a reminder, when visiting for lunch, please plan to sit with your child at the **designated visitor table**. For safety and consistency, we kindly ask that lunch visits be limited to you and your child—**no additional student guests, please**.

## Food Deliveries

Food delivery services disrupt the learning environment and pose a potential security concern. Various doors have been utilized, and most delivery service providers have unfamiliar faces that are challenging to verify. **We will not accept meals delivered by paid delivery services during the school day for students. These deliveries will be refused.**

## Visitors During the School Day



As a reminder, all elementary schools in the district—including Overland Trail Elementary—utilize a **buzz-in entry system** for all visitors during the school day to help maintain a safe and secure environment.

When visiting the school, please come to the **main entrance** and press the buzzer. You will be asked to:

1. Show a government-issued photo ID
2. State the purpose of your visit

This process is required **each time** you visit the school. If you arrive without identification, the office will need to seek administrative approval before allowing entry.

For security reasons, we kindly ask that all guests **refrain from holding the door open for others**. Each visitor should go through the buzz-in process individually to ensure proper screening.

## Back-to-School Events

### **All Students | Sneak-a-Peek: Monday, August 11 | 5:00-6:30**

We're excited to welcome families into the building for our Sneak-a-Peek event on Monday, August 11. This optional event provides a wonderful opportunity for you to walk your child into the school, visit their classroom, meet their teacher, take photos, and explore their new learning space together. While attendance is not required, we highly encourage families to attend, as this will be the only opportunity for adults to accompany children into the building—families will not enter with students on the first day of school. We look forward to seeing you there!



### **Grades 1-5 | First Day of School: Wednesday, August 13**

As the safety of our students and staff remains our top priority, all elementary schools in Blue Valley will follow standard safety procedures during arrival on the first day of school, Wednesday, August 13. Students will enter the building at their designated entry time without adult accompaniment. We welcome families to join us on campus that morning to share a special goodbye, take first-day photos, and give hugs on the front lawn before students head inside. Thank you for supporting our efforts to maintain a safe and secure school environment during arrival.

### **Kindergarten | Orientation: Wednesday, August 13**

Our Kindergarten team is excited to welcome our incoming students and their families for a special orientation session. This time together will allow children to explore their new learning environment, meet classmates, and ease any first-day jitters. Parents and caregivers will have the opportunity to ask questions, take photos, connect with the teacher about transportation, and begin building relationships within the classroom community. Families will attend orientation based on their last name, according to the schedule below.

Please sign up by clicking the session that corresponds with your assigned time:

- [Session 1](#) (9:00 AM-10:00 AM) | Last names A-M
- [Session 2](#) (10:30 AM-11:30 AM) | Last names N-Z

### **Kindergarten | First Day of School and KinderCamp (Kindergarten): Thursday, August 14-Friday, August 15**

KinderCamp is a special opportunity designed to help our youngest learners transition smoothly into school. During this experience, students will explore the kindergarten classroom environment, engage in foundational learning activities, and begin building relationships with peers and staff. On Thursday and Friday, students will start their day in a temporary homeroom and rotate midday to another kindergarten classroom. At the end of the day, they will return to their original homeroom to prepare for dismissal.

This thoughtful structure allows our kindergarten team to get to know each child and observe them in a variety of settings. It helps us determine the best learning environment for your child—considering teacher fit, instructional style, and peer connections—before assigning permanent

homerooms for the year, which will begin on Monday, August 18. We look forward to welcoming your child and beginning this exciting journey together!

### **Grades K-5 | Back-to-School Night: Thursday, August 21 | 5:00 PM-6:30 PM**

We are excited to welcome you to Back-to-School Night on Thursday, August 21! This important event gives families the opportunity to learn more about their child's classroom, curriculum, and expectations for the upcoming school year. Your child's teacher will present to the group, sharing key information to help you support your child's success and confidently navigate the year ahead. You'll also hear about opportunities to get involved with the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and ways you can contribute to classroom events and schoolwide activities. The event will be offered in two sessions, and families are asked to select the session that works best for them and plan to attend from start to finish. We look forward to seeing you there and partnering with you for a strong start to the school year!

## **Birthday Policy**

Due to the growing number of food allergies and medical needs of students, OTE has a **non-edible** treat policy. Students may bring non-edible birthday treats (e.g., pencils, stickers, etc.) per arrangement with the classroom teacher. Remember that a birthday celebration should not take away from instructional time.

**Birthday Invitations:** We ask that students not distribute invitations to private birthday parties at school unless every class member receives an invitation.



### **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 accessing the link below.





**BV Nut Safer Guidelines | 25-26**

[drive.google.com](https://drive.google.com)



**BV Nut Safe Guidelines | 25-26 Translation**

[drive.google.com](https://drive.google.com)

**School Supply Lists**

**District Calendar | 2025-2026**

**Overland Trail Elementary's Homepage**

**Family Handbook**



**Erica McDonald, Principal**

**Email:** [ECMcDonald@bluevalleyk12.org](mailto:ECMcDonald@bluevalleyk12.org)

**Website:** [www.bluevalleyk12.org/OTE](http://www.bluevalleyk12.org/OTE)

**Location:** [6225 West 133rd Street, Overland Park, KS, USA](#)

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

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

**Alicia Anderson, Assistant Principal**

**Email:** [ARAnderson@bluevalleyk12.org](mailto:ARAnderson@bluevalleyk12.org)

**Website:** [www.bluevalleyk12.org/OTE](http://www.bluevalleyk12.org/OTE)

**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

**Website:** [www.bluevalleyk12.org/OTE](http://www.bluevalleyk12.org/OTE)

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**Erica McDonald**

Erica is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters