

# Cougar Connect

August 22, 2025



## A Note From Mrs. McDonald

Dear Families,

Thank you to all parents and guardians for joining us for Back-to-School Night. We know the evening included a lot of information, and we truly appreciate your time and engagement. If you have any questions or would like clarification, please don't hesitate to reach out to your child's teacher.

A heartfelt thank you to our outstanding PTO—and especially to Lindsay Persell and Robin Snider—for planning and delivering the

delicious Sonic 🥤 drinks. We are truly grateful for the support and care you continue to show our staff and the entire OTE community.

## Elementary Professional Collaboration

August 29 is a non-attendance day for K–5 students to allow dedicated teacher collaboration time. On this day, elementary educators will be in their buildings and classrooms working together to plan instruction and assessments.

This time is vital to ensuring the best possible preparation for our elementary students and supporting student learning outcomes.

School will be back in session on September 3.

## !! Kindergarten Families

Please see your email for information about the required Ages & Stages Questionnaire that should be completed for all kindergarten students. If you have not yet completed this questionnaire, we kindly ask that you do this weekend.

## Arrival & Dismissal Reminders

Our arrival and dismissal routines were thoughtfully designed in partnership with the Overland Park Police Department to ensure safety and efficiency for all. While it may sometimes feel convenient to take shortcuts, doing so can create safety concerns and disrupt the flow of dismissal. We kindly ask that you help us maintain a safe and productive process by following these expectations:

Car Line

- To enable a more efficient drop off and pick up process, all vehicles must pull up to the furthest point.
- Drivers must stay in their vehicle. All students must enter from the passenger side.

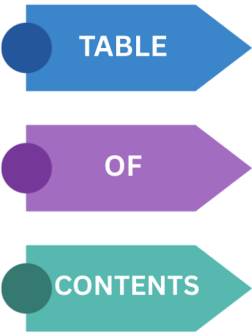
Walkers

- Students and adults are not permitted to use the crosswalk without a crossing guard. For any individual transitioning on foot during school hours, you must cross the street at the roundabout and with the support of the crossing guard.
- If you would like to walk your child to and away from the front entrance for arrival or dismissal, please park in the south parking lot and use the sidewalk leading to the main entrance. For safety reasons, families may not park in the east lot and cross at the crosswalk through the car line.

The staff sincerely appreciates your cooperation and adherence to these procedures–have a lovely weekend, OTE!

With Cougar pride,  
Erica McDonald  
Principal

Table of Contents



**Recurring News:**

- Save-the-Date
- Nurse's Note
- ☆\*Unity Squad\*☆
- Parent-Teacher Organization | PTO

**Recent News:**

- Welcome to OTE | Heather Meinking, Social Worker
- Game Atmosphere
- Code of Conduct
- Cougar Chorus | Grade 5

**Repeat News**

- Greetings From Ms. Harsch, Counselor
- OTE Specials | Newsletter
- Understanding Payments in Blue Valley
- 2025-26 BV Calendar Change
- Securly Home: Partnering for Your Child's Online Safety
- Visitors During the School Day

- Birthday Policy
- Nut-Safer Guidelines
- Helpful Links (i.e., Kindergarten Tidbits, School Supply Lists, Family Handbook, etc.)

## Save-the-Date



### August

**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, Swearengin) | 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 ✨

### Community Celebrations and Observances

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

Some September Celebrations & Observances:

- Hunger Action Month - dedicated to taking action to end hunger. The BV Food Pantry, located at Hilltop Conference Center, is available to all Blue Valley community members. Click this [LINK](#) to make an appointment.



- Milad Un-Nabi, also known as Mawlid - the evening of September 4th through September 5, is an Islamic holiday to commemorate the birth of Prophet Muhammad. Some Muslim families will gather to recite the Prophet's teachings, decorate their homes with lights, and/or prepare a feast which is served to guests and the poor.
- National Hispanic Heritage Month - September 15 to October 15 celebrates the history, diverse cultures, achievements, and contributions of individuals with Hispanic and Latino heritage.
- Constitution Day - The United States commemorates the signing of the U.S. Constitution on September 17, 1787.
- Rosh Hashanah - the Jewish New Year. Observance begins at sundown on September 22 and continues through the evening of September 24. For some, families will attend services at synagogue, eat apples and honey for a sweet new year, and/or abstain from work, school, activities, and technology use.

## Parent-Teacher Organization | PTO



### PTO News & Updates

Wow—what an amazing turnout at Back to School Night! 🎉 We loved seeing so many families stop by the library to learn more about the PTO and how to get involved. Thank you for bringing such great energy to kick off the year! Want to join in the fun? Our PTO Board Meetings are always open to all parents—our next meeting is **Monday, September 15 at 5:30 PM in the OTE Library**. Don't forget to create your free account at [otepto.org](https://otepto.org) and complete your student's directory information so they'll receive their **free field trip shirt**!

### Mark Your Calendar

- 🛹 **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!
- 🥭 **Tropical Smoothie Fundraiser** – *Thursday, August 28, 5-7 PM @ 119th location.*  
Sip to support OTE! Join us at Tropical Smoothie Café on **Thursday, August 28 from 2–5 PM** and enjoy your favorite smoothies, bowls, and bites. **20% of sales come back to OTE** when you scan the QR code in-store or use promo code **TSCGIVES** online or in the app. [Download the flyer by clicking here.](#)

### 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 are live on the PTO website](#) 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 | Heather Meinking, Social Worker

## Game Atmosphere

Blue Valley families,

We are excited to have your families come to support our high school activities and athletics. It is great to see the entire community at these events. It is imperative that our parent community partner with us as we work to encourage positive elementary and middle school behavior at high school games or events.

We are asking that all elementary and middle school students enter the game with an adult and sit with that adult throughout the game. Please do not drop your child off at a district event without supervision, as they will not be allowed to enter. It is challenging to monitor and keep all students safe without the help of our parent community.

As we see more students using motorized scooters and electric bikes to get to and from school, we want to ensure these devices are used responsibly, especially during busy events. Students are allowed to ride these devices to Blue Valley athletic and activity events, but they must dismount, turn off and secure their device in designated areas once on campus. This includes sidewalks, parking lots and other areas on campus. We appreciate your partnership in keeping our events safe and welcoming for all attendees.



Thanks for your help with these protocols to make district events a great experience for all who attend. We hope to see your family cheering for our Blue Valley teams this school year.

Matt Ortman

Director of School Administration, Athletics and Activities

Blue Valley School District

## Code of Conduct



As we begin the school year, we would like to remind you to review the *Blue Valley Student Code of Conduct*. It can be found on [www.bluevalleyk12.org](http://www.bluevalleyk12.org) under the "Student Quick Links" section at the bottom main home page. It can also be found on our school website home page as well.

## Cougar Chorus



### Cougar Chorus

Come Sing With Us!

🔗 [secure.smores.com](https://secure.smores.com)

## 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).

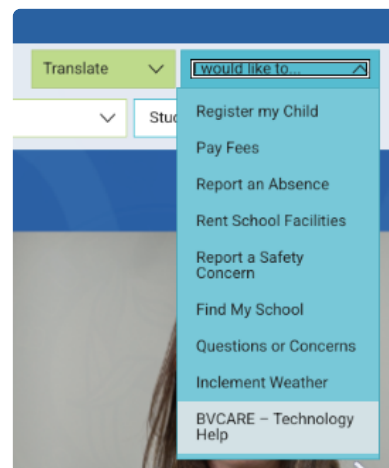
## Securly Home: Partnering for Your Child's Online Safety

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/securlly> or <https://www.securlly.com/home-parent>

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

## 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.

## 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](#)



### **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](#)

### **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)

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

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

**Twitter:** [@OTECougars](#)



**Erica McDonald**

Erica is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters