

# Cougar Connect

August 29, 2025



## A Note From Mrs. McDonald

Dear Families,

We had a spectacular second full week of school! Our students are settling into routines and adapting well to their new classroom environments. Thank you, families, for your continued support of the OTE staff as we work together to ensure a strong start to the school year.

May you enjoy the extended weekend, OTE. We look forward to the return of all students on Wednesday, September 3.

With Cougar pride,  
Erica McDonald  
Principal

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## Save-the-Date



### September

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

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

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

**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**

The Fall allergy season has begun! Students with seasonal allergies are often bothered by itchy watery eyes, sneezing, post-nasal drip and scratchy throats. Please remember that if your child takes allergy medication on a daily basis that they are receiving that medication consistently prior to coming to school as we want them to have the best opportunity to stay focused on learning within the classroom. This school year we will not stock

allergy medications like Zyrtec or Claritin in the health room, so it is important for students who suffer from allergies to remember to take their medications at home. Thank You!

## ✨ Unity Squad ✨

### **Community Celebrations and Observances**

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

Some September Celebrations & Observances:

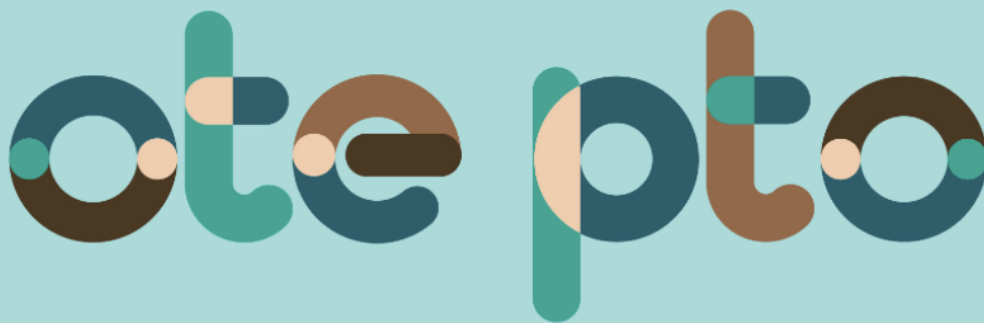
- Hunger Action Month - dedicated to taking action to end hunger. The BV Food Pantry, located at Hilltop Conference Center, is available to all Blue



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**!

### Level Up! Carnival Pre-Order Store is LIVE!

Get ready, Cougars—it's time to **Level Up!** 🎮 Our Fall Carnival is coming on **Saturday, October 4**, and the PTO Store for **pre-orders is now LIVE** at [otepto.org](https://otepto.org)! Snag your Player One Packs, XP tickets, and Level Up Gear early to skip the lines and maximize the fun. **Don't wait—pre-order today at [otepto.org/carnival-store](https://otepto.org/carnival-store)!**



### 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 | Regan LeValley, Grade 5

# Welcome to OTE!



*Regan LeValley*

**Schooling:** Kansas State University [bachelor's] and Emporia State University [master's]

**Number of Years Working in Schools:** 4 years  
**Role at OTE:** 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher



**Fun Fact about Me:** I love building LEGO sets. My collection keeps growing!

## Proactive School Safety | How Blue Valley Addresses and Assesses Threats

At Blue Valley Schools, student safety is our top priority. Our approach to safety blends proactive prevention, fostering strong adult-student relationships and maintaining robust physical security measures. Central to our strategy is understanding and addressing potential threats.

### What Constitutes a Threat?

A threat includes any expression of intent to harm, whether spoken or written. Identifying and responding to these expressions is crucial to the safety of our school community.

### The Role of Threat Assessments

Blue Valley's comprehensive threat assessment process has two primary objectives:

- **Preventing Violence:** We work to intervene before potential threats escalate.
- **Resolving Underlying Issues:** By understanding the reasons behind a threat, we can resolve conflicts and provide necessary support.

### Structured, Evidence-Based Approach

Blue Valley Schools follows the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG), a nationally recognized, evidence-based program. This approach ensures that we not only prevent violence but also support individuals in need.



Since the fall of 2023, Blue Valley building leaders have been trained in and actively using this Threat Assessment approach. This consistent use of CSTAG has equipped leaders with a common vocabulary and protocol, enabling them to resolve situations more effectively when threats arise.

By staying committed to this structured and compassionate approach, Blue Valley Schools ensures that students and staff are supported, safe and able to focus on what truly matters—learning through extraordinary educational opportunities.

More information about Blue Valley's threat assessment process is available on the [district website](#).

## 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)

## 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.

## 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](#)



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

[drive.google.com](#)

**School Supply Lists**

**District Calendar | 2025-2026**

**Overland Trail Elementary's Homepage**

**Family Handbook**





### **Erica McDonald, Principal**

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

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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