

Cougar Connect

February 21, 2025

A Note From Mrs. McDonald



A Note From Mrs. McDonald

Good afternoon,

Thank you, room parents and volunteers, for working flexibly to give students a fun and memorable celebration. I enjoyed walking the building and seeing the warm smiles, big energy, and fun activities. The OTE staff is beyond grateful for your contribution.

On Tuesday, registration for incoming kindergarten students opened. As we enter a season of enrollment, please look for information next Friday that will enable parents and guardians to provide input on your child's classroom setting for the next school year.

We look forward to a FULL (Yah!) week of learning next week. I wish you a great weekend, families.

Best,
Erica McDonald
Principal

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Save-the-Date



Save-the-Date

February

Monday, February 24: Unity Squad Meeting; 4:00-5:00 PM

Wednesday, February 26: Virtual Winter Conferences; 4:00 PM-7:40 PM

Friday, February 28: PTO Yearbook Sales Open

March

Monday, March 3: BLT Meeting; 4:00 PM-5:00 PM

Monday, March 3- Friday, March 7: Cultural Week

Thursday, March 6: Classified Staff Meeting; 8:00 AM-8:20 AM

Thursday, March 6: First Grade Music Program; Dress Rehearsal 2:30 PM; Performance 6:00 PM (OTE)

Thursday, March 7: All Staff Meeting; 8:00 AM-8:20 AM

Friday, March 7: PTO Board Meeting; 9:00 AM-10:00 AM

Friday, March 7: Cultural Night; 6:00-8:00 PM

Friday, March 14: No School | End of Quarter 3

Monday, March 17-Friday, March 21: No School | Spring Break

Monday, March 24: No School | Professional Learning

Monday, March 31: PTO Online Auction Opens

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

✦ Unity Squad Spotlight ✦



Due to inclement weather, we rescheduled the Unity Squad meeting for the third quarter. Please plan to join us on Monday, February 24 to learn more about Overland Trail Elementary while contributing to enhancing school-wide efforts.

Community Celebrations and Observances



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

Some February Celebrations & Observances:

- **Black History Month** - created to celebrate the achievements, contributions, and rich cultural heritages of African Americans. Black History Month highlights the triumphs and adversities that have helped shape the United States.
- **World Hijab Day** - February 1 - this day recognizes the millions of Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab. Inviting women of all identities to wear the hijab for one day, it promotes understanding of other cultures and personal freedoms of religious expression.
- **Lunar New Year** - February 10 - celebrated by families of Chinese and other Asian heritages, some people celebrate with religious ceremonies honoring ancestors, giving and receiving red envelopes containing small amounts of money, lighting colorful lanterns, and eating traditional foods such as dumplings and sticky rice balls that symbolize family unity.
- **Ash Wednesday** - February 14 - a Christian holiday signifying the first day of the Lenten season, the 40 days (excluding Sundays) leading to Easter. Some families will attend religious services and receive ashes in the shape of a cross on their forehead.
- **Magha Puja Day** - February 24 - an important Buddhist festival celebrating the gathering between Buddha and his first disciples. Some families will attend temple, meditate, listen to teachings, perform giving alms, and hold candlelight processions.



PTO Events | February

Cultural Night | Sign up to host a table or perform!

Save the date for OTE Cultural Night on Friday, March 7th, and join us in celebrating the incredible diversity of our community! This family-friendly event will feature music, dance, art, and traditions from around the world, along with vibrant cultural displays, delicious food, and captivating performances. Students will enjoy exploring the event with their own "passports," collecting stamps and learning about different cultures for a chance to win a prize. To make this celebration unforgettable, we need your help! Sign up to host a table or perform and share your culture or talents with our community. Click below for more details and the sign-up form—we can't wait to see you there!



Cultural Night Information and Sign Up: <https://www.otepto.org/cultural-night>

Don't miss out! Register today for Trivia Night! | Saturday, April 5

Live from Overland Park, it's Saturday Night! Ready to bring the laughs and test your trivia skills? Register now for our Trivia Night and Auction! Whether you gather your own cast of characters and register as a team or sign up solo and join forces with fellow fans, this is your chance to shine under the spotlight. Assemble your Spartan Cheerleaders, Coneheads, or Weekend Update anchors and compete for the ultimate bragging rights—all while supporting our school. Don't wait—spaces are limited, and you won't want to miss this night of comedy, camaraderie, and fundraising!



Annual Trivia Night & Auction | Saturday April 5, 2025

Register at <https://www.otepto.org/trivia>.

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).

Welcome to Overland Trail Elementary | Mandy Kohler

WELCOME TO

Overland Trail Elementary



Mandy Kohler

"I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO JOINING THE OTE TEAM FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE YEAR. I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO CREATING CONNECTIONS WITH MY NEW TEAM MEMBERS AND GETTING TO KNOW THE SCHOOL'S FAMILIES AS WELL.

WHEN I AM NOT TEACHING, I AM AN AVID READER. LOVE TAKING HIKES, AND SPENDING TIME WITH MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS. I AM A HUGE ANIMAL LOVER, AND HAVE TWO DOGS, BIZZY AND PADDY CAKE, TWO CATS, ANGUS AND AUTUMN, AND A FISH THAT WAS A PREVIOUS CLASSROOM PET THAT CAME HOME WITH ME AT THE END OF LAST SCHOOL YEAR.

I JUST WRAPPED UP MY MASTER'S IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION, AND I'M EXCITED TO HAVE SOME FREE TIME AGAIN!"

ROLE AT OTE: LONG-TERM SUBSTITUTE; INTERRELATED RESOURCE TEACHER



Virtual Conferences | Wednesday, February 26

Due to inclement weather, we are sorry we will miss our evening virtual conferences on Wednesday, February 19. If you were planning to meet with one of our teachers on Wednesday, February 19, these virtual conferences will be rescheduled for Wednesday, February 26, during your already scheduled time. Contact your child's teacher if you need to reschedule due to a conflict on February 26. As a reminder, all conferences on Wednesday, February 26, will be virtual.

Student Attendance Day | February 28

Blue Valley families,

This winter has brought an unprecedented number of inclement weather days — eight so far — exceeding the five built into our 2024-25 school calendar. While keeping our students and staff safe remains our top priority, we must also ensure we meet the state's required instructional time. To put our district in the best position to meet these requirements and maintain our long-standing goal of ending the school year by Memorial Day, we are making the following adjustments:

- **Friday, Feb. 28** – The scheduled elementary teacher professional collaboration day will now be a school day.
- **Early March high school late start changes** – There will be no late start on March 4, 6, 11 or 13. School will begin at the normal time on those dates.

- **Friday, April 25** – The scheduled professional learning day will now be a school day for all students.

We recognize that changes to the calendar present challenges for students, families, and staff alike, and we appreciate your flexibility as we navigate these adjustments. Our focus remains on keeping students learning while meeting state requirements.

While these changes address our current situation, we will announce the last day of school after Spring Break when most winter weather events have passed, allowing for a clearer decision. Thank you for your understanding and partnership as we work through this challenging winter together.

Blue Valley Schools

Tonya Merrigan
Superintendent

Kindergarten Registration | 2025 - 2026

Dear Families,

Kindergarten registration for the 2025-2026 school year is now open.

 To read this message in a language other than English, [click here](#).

We are excited to welcome your new kindergarten student for the 2025-26 school year. Please review and complete the steps below. Your timely registration will ensure our team is prepared. In a future message, we will send more information about Kindergarten Kick-Off (formerly known as Kindergarten Round-Up).

Step 1: Please watch this school welcome [here](#).

Step 2: Do you have questions about kindergarten programs in Blue Valley? (Click on the blue links below)

- What do kindergarten students experience during a [typical day](#)?
- How can I learn about the [Chinese immersion](#) option?

Step 3: Is there another language spoken in your home?

If so, please complete this [form](#). Otherwise, move to step 4.

Note: If your family speaks English *in addition* to another language, you will still need to complete the form.

Step 4: How do I register my child?

 To view registration instructions in a language other than English, [click here](#).

To begin the registration process for the 2025-26 school year, simply go to

www.bluevalleyk12.org/registration and click **New Student Registration** in the Useful Links.

Families new to Blue Valley will be asked to create an online parent account. Online registration

will take approximately 20 minutes to complete, and it is an important step in getting your student started in kindergarten! You will be asked to pay fees later this spring.

Please note: If your child is currently enrolled in the Blue Valley early childhood program, you will not complete online registration at this time. Families transitioning from early childhood to kindergarten will be able to verify the information and complete the registration process later this spring.

To make Blue Valley's Online Registration process smooth and convenient, please have the following information available:

- Student proof of identity (birth certificate)
- Emergency contact name(s) and phone number(s)
- Doctor, dentist, and preferred hospital contact info
- Immunization record and health assessment (physical)
- Proof of residency (purchase contract, lease, or current utility bill)
- Custodial documentation (if applicable)
- Previous school records and contact info
- IEP or 504 Plan (if applicable)

Tip: As soon as your child's registration is complete, you will receive all school communication items that will help welcome you and your family into the school community.

If you have any questions, please call the Overland Trail Elementary office at 913-239-7000.

Important Dates for Kindergarten Families

- Kindergarten Online Registration Begins | Tuesday, February 18
- Kindergarten Kick-Off Sessions | Friday, April 11
- Kindergarten Orientation Sessions | Wednesday, August 13
- First full day of school for Kindergarten | Thursday, August 14

Thank you,
Erica McDonald
Principal

INCOMING KINDERGARTEN DATES 2025-2026

Kindergarten Online Registration Begins

February 18

Kindergarten Kick-Off Sessions
(Formerly Kindergarten Round-Up)

April 11

Kindergarten Orientation Sessions

August 13

First full day of school for Kindergarten

August 14



**Contact your neighborhood
school for more information.**

Growth and Development | Grade 4 & 5 | Thursday, March 13

Dear OTE Families:

The growth seen during the elementary years can be an exciting time in health education. The Blue Valley Health Curriculum was written by a committee of Blue Valley teachers, nurses, and counselors to educate our students about health-related issues. The curriculum was reviewed by the Curriculum and Instruction Committee (which includes parents, board of education members and faculty members) prior to being approved by the Blue Valley Board of Education. It is based on the National and Kansas Health standards. The purpose of the curriculum is to develop positive attitudes toward health and wellness among our students. The curriculum learning standards can be found at Blue Valley Website (<http://www.bluevalleyk12.org/>) and select Academics – Elementary School – Curriculum - Health.

The content taught in 4th and 5th grade focuses on the topic of human growth and development.

These topics are introduced at age-appropriate levels of understanding. The identification of male and female reproductive parts and functions are part of the intermediate curriculum in grades 4 and 5. This content will be presented separately by both grade and gender. During instruction students are always encouraged to talk with their families about concepts learned in health.

The Growth and Development curriculum will be taught on **Thursday, March 13th, 2025**. You are welcome to contact Nurse Jenn to review the district approved instructional materials that will be presented. If for any reason you choose *not* to have your student participate in the session, please email Nurse Jenn at JAArnoldColeman@bluevalleyk12.org to opt-out.

Thank you for your continued support.

Jenn Arnold Coleman
Nurse

BVEF Champion for Students Award

Do you know a Blue Valley educator who goes above and beyond to cultivate a learning environment where relationships are the cornerstone, where kindness and compassion are guiding principles, and making a profound difference in the lives of young people is not just a goal but a lived reality? Help the Blue Valley Educational Foundation (BVEF) recognize their extraordinary impact by nominating them today for the BVEF annual Champion for Students Award! This \$2,500 BVEF award recognizes three exemplary teachers (one elementary, one middle, and one high) whose impact extends far beyond the learning environment, shaping the trajectory of their students' journeys and leaving an enduring legacy of excellence.

Any member of the Blue Valley Schools' Community (e.g., school administrator, student, family member, staff, etc.) is welcome to submit [one nomination](#) on behalf of an educator (any staff member in Blue Valley Schools - teacher, paraprofessional, administrator, kitchen manager, etc.). The application window will open on February 10th and close on March 7th.

To nominate an educator, complete the [2025 BVEF Champion for Students Award form](#) by Friday, March 7th.

Chinese Immersion Info Meeting Set for Incoming Kindergarten Families

Are you interested in providing your child with an immersive educational experience that broadens horizons, enhances cognitive skills and teaches second language skills? Would you like to learn more about Blue Valley's Chinese Immersion program?

Prospective Chinese Immersion Family Information Session

📅 5 p.m. Feb. 25

🔗 [Register for the information session online](#)

🔗 Zoom link provided upon registration

📺 Watch a [video](#) that provides a glimpse into Chinese Immersion classrooms

Online applications for the program will open Feb. 28 with a lottery system determining participation in the program. For more information about the immersion program, visit www.bluevalleyk12.org/immersion.

Starting Strong | Kindergarten - Grade 2



NAVIGATING TRANSITIONS: Empowering Parents with Conscious Discipline

BV Well invites **early elementary (K-2) parents** and caregivers to this session designed to provide insights and tools for supporting your child's development and wellbeing.

Presented by certified instructor Heather Buckman, this session will focus on helping families navigate transitions through the framework of **Conscious Discipline**. Parents will gain insights into **how the brain responds to stress and change**, learn **practical techniques to support emotional resilience**, and explore strategies to **build stronger connections with their children**. The session will include interactive discussions, real-life examples, and take-home resources to empower parents to create a harmonious and nurturing home environment.

A **Panel Discussion with Blue Valley educational leaders** will follow the presentation. The session is free; for planning purposes, please [register](https://fundbv.org/bvwell) in advance at fundbv.org/bvwell.



Heather Buckman spent 7 years teaching 4th and 5th grade while contributing to various building and district leadership roles before transitioning to an administrative position as assistant principal in a Title 1 School; a role she has currently held for the last nine years. There, she spearheaded the transformative implementation of Conscious Discipline where they've witnessed an increase in academic achievement and school culture, alongside a decrease in discipline issues and staff turnover. Heather holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education from Missouri State University and a Master of Science in Educational Leadership from Northwest Missouri State.



Starting Strong Series Sponsor:



Starting Strong | Grade 5



NAVIGATING TRANSITIONS: Empowering Parents with Conscious Discipline

BV Well invites 5th and 6th grade parents and caregivers to this session designed to provide insights and tools for supporting your child's development and wellbeing.

Presented by certified instructor Heather Buckman, this session will focus on helping families navigate transitions through the framework of **Conscious Discipline**. Parents will gain insights into **how the brain responds to stress and change**, learn **practical techniques to support emotional resilience**, and explore strategies to **build stronger connections with their children**. The session will include interactive discussions, real-life examples, and take-home resources to empower parents to create a harmonious and nurturing home environment.

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Starting Strong Series Sponsor:



Sunflower House

OTE is excited to welcome Sunflower House to our school on February 24th, 25th and 26th to teach our students about safety. Kindergarten and First grade will learn about personal safety from Happy Bear! 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders will learn about safety from a trained Sunflower House educator on the Think First and Stay Safe: Safe and Healthy Boundaries curriculum. By talking with our young children about these important safety issues, we will create a safer community for all children. If you would like your child to opt-out of the presentation, please fill out the link below:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd-tjvayiJ0jLwnp0tLhNz417x68994ZgMjy10u5FWTHqzuBg/viewform?usp=sf_link

If you have questions, please reach out to Emily Harsch at eharsch@bluevalleyk12.org

13th Annual Battle of the Bands

Join friends for a great adult night out with live music, a silent auction, a wine and bourbon pull and more! Proceeds from this annual fundraiser support music and performing arts programs throughout the district, and YOU can be part of the fun! Check out our new location at Fiorella's event space in OP for a great over-21 night out. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and YOU choose the "Best of Blue Valley" live band when the competition wraps up at 10 p.m. Bands are made up of BV parents, teachers and staff and funds provide significant funding for performing arts programs



including band, orchestra, choir, theater, debate and competitive speaking. Get tickets today at [Event Details](#).

Can't make it to the event in person? No worries! Visit [Silent Auction](#) to start your bid on incredible auction packages and see what your school submitted. Check back frequently as more items are added to the offerings every week. The auction will close on Friday, February 21 at 8:45 p.m. and you do not have to be present to win!

You can also vote by donation for your favorite adult school-affiliated band, and the winner receives a \$1,000 grant to their school of choice. The 2025 band names, order of performances and school representations are as follows:

Young Medicine- Lakewood Elementary

Modern Thieves- Mission Trail Elementary, Leawood Middle, Blue Valley North

KC Prime- Leawood Elementary and Leawood Middle

Hope to see you Friday, February 21, 2025, as we Rock the Valley for BV Schools!

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
- 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

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



Nut Safer List 24-25

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 list of nut-safe foods and BV Guidelines can be found [here](#).

Helpful Links

[School Supply Lists](#)

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

[District Calendar \(2025-2026\)](#)

[Overland Trail Elementary's Homepage](#)

[Family Handbook](#)

Erica McDonald, Principal

Email: ECMcDonald@bluevalleyk12.org

Website: 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

Website: 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

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

Phone: (913) 239-7000

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



Erica McDonald

Erica is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters