

# Cougar Connect

February 7, 2025

## A Note From Mrs. McDonald



### A Note From Mrs. McDonald

Dear Families,

We look forward to seeing you at Winter Conferences next week. Please use this [link](#) to sign up for a conference if you have not yet done so. The Winter Conference schedule is listed in the save the date posted below.

GO CHIEFS!

Best,  
Erica McDonald  
Principal

## Newsletter Table of Contents



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#### Recurring News:

- Save-the-Date
- ✨Unity Squad Spotlight ✨
- Community Celebrations and Observances
- Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) News

#### Recent News:

- BVEF Champion for Students Award
- The Major Saver Campaign Has Been Extended!

#### Repeat News:

- Every Child Can Read Act

- Starting Strong | Kindergarten - Grade 2
- Starting Strong | Grade 5
- Blue Valley North Summer Volleyball Camp
- Securly Home
- Winter Conferences
- Valentine's Bag Supplies
- Valentine's Treat Guidelines
- Sunflower House
- BVUnmuted Legislative Podcast
- Fostering A Safe School Environment
- Incoming Kindergarten Pre-registration (2025-2026)
- 13th Annual Battle of the Bands
- Teacher Collaboration Days
- Nut-Safer Guidelines
- Helpful Links (i.e., School Supply Lists, Family Handbook, etc.)

## Save-the-Date



### Save-the-Date

#### February

**Tuesday, February 11:** Winter Conferences; 4:00 PM-7:40 PM

**Wednesday, February 12:** Valentine's Day Parties; 2:45-3:25 PM

**Wednesday, February 12:** Winter Conferences; 4:00 PM-7:40 PM

**Thursday, February 13:** No School EC-8 | Winter Conferences;

8:20 AM-3:00 PM

**Friday, February 14:** No School | District-Wide Break

**Monday, February 17:** No School | President's Day

**Wednesday, February 19:** Fifth Grade Field Trip | School of Economics

**Wednesday, February 19:** PTO Community Service

**Friday, February 28:** No School | Teacher Professional Collaboration

**Friday, February 28:** PTO Yearbook Sales Open

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)

## ✨ Unity Squad Spotlight ✨

# I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.

- Martin Luther King Jr.



## 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

### Glow Party | Friday, February 7

Join us for **Glow Night** tonight, **Friday, February 7**, from **6:00–8:00 PM**! This exciting event will feature a **DJ, fun photo ops, glow sticks, and glow balloons!**

**Important Reminder:** All students must be accompanied by an adult for the entire event. **No drop-offs allowed.** Students who are not accompanied by an adult will not be allowed to enter.



### Soup and Chili Cook-Off - Sign ups needed! | Tuesday, February 11

Help treat our amazing staff and teachers to a warm and delicious lunch while having some competitive fun! Enter in your favorite soup or chili to have the chance to win a \$25 Target gift card, one winner for best soup and one for best chili!

[Soup and Chili Cook-Off Sign Up](#)



### February Community Service | Wednesday, February 19

This month's Community Service meeting will be on Wednesday, February 19 from 3:45 - 4:30pm in the OTE Art Room. RSVP for the event by clicking the button below. Parents are encouraged to attend with their student(s) and remember to update Pick-up Patrol for that day!

[Community Service Meeting Sign Up](#)



### Panera Restaurant Night | Thursday, February 20

Take one thing off your to do list and grab a meal from Panera on Thursday, February 20th. Whether ordering online, in the app, or in person, use the code FUND4U and 20% of sales will be donated back to Overland Trail Elementary PTO!



## 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!



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)

## BVEF Champion for Students Award

## 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.

## The Major Saver Campaign Has Been Extended

### The Major Saver Campaign Has Been Extended!

We have exciting news! The 2025 Major Saver campaign has been extended through Super Bowl Weekend! The last day to purchase your 2025 BVEF Major Saver card is Monday, February 10th. As we celebrate a fun weekend for Kansas City, there's no better time to ask family and friends to support the Blue Valley Educational Foundation and Overland Trail Elementary.

Have out-of-town relatives? No problem! They can contribute a flat donation directly through your student's fundraising link. Every \$20 card purchased, or donation made helps fund programs that make a significant difference for our students.

Thank you for your participation! Keep up the great work and GO CHIEFS!



## Chinese Immersion Info Meeting Set for Incoming Kindergarten Families

### 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](http://www.bluevalleyk12.org/immersion).

## Every Child Can Read Act

### Every Child Can Read Act

On July 1, 2023, the Every Child Can Read Act went into effect in Kansas. The intent of this legislation was to address literacy initiatives with a target of ensuring students reach grade level benchmarks by third grade. In Blue Valley, we prioritize partnership with families in conjunction with high quality, evidence-based instruction rooted in the science of reading. This has been and remains a large area of focus for professional learning. Rather than limit conversations about reading progress to 3rd grade, it is our practice to do so at each grade level. KSDE has provided a summary of this Act which can be found [here](#). Our teachers look forward to talking with you about your child during Parent-Teacher conferences.

## 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](#) in advance at [fundbv.org/bvwell](http://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 I 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:



## Blue Valley North Summer Volleyball Camp

### Blue Valley North Summer Volleyball Camp

3rd - 6th Grade Girls (for 2025/2026 school year): Join the Blue Valley North VB team at their annual Summer camp. This is a great opportunity for girls who play or who are interested in volleyball to work on their skills and have some fun. The camp runs from June 9th - 12th, from 9:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. at BVN High School.

Register HERE: <https://forms.gle/vHpHWBLu3szGM6yX9>

## Securly Home

### Securly Home

Have you ever wondered how to monitor your child's usage on their Blue Valley device? We have parent tools that allow you to receive notifications to ensure your child is using their device safely. School staff members monitor these devices during the school day and intervene, when necessary. However, parents can receive alerts if concerns arise when students use devices after school hours—including weekends and school breaks.

Check out the [Securly Home](#) Parent Portal App here.

## Winter Conferences



The following email was sent to all families on Wednesday, January 15.

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

It is time to sign up for a conference this winter. Suppose you schedule a conference on Tuesday, February 11, or Thursday, February 13. In that case, you will want to follow the directions provided so that your child's teacher understands your meeting preference, in-person or virtual. Lastly, Wednesday, February 12, is virtual, with no option to meet in person.

Click [here](#) to learn how to reserve a time with your child's teacher this February.

Best,  
Erica McDonald  
Principal

## Valentine's Bag Supplies

### Valentine's Bag Supplies

This year we will be creating Valentine Bags at school with our buddy classes! This gives a fun team building activity for our students and bags will already be complete for class parties on the 12th. We will supply the bags but would love your help gathering a few more items. If you are able to send in stickers, glue sticks, pipe cleaners, crepe paper/streamers or markers we would greatly appreciate it. All items should be sent to school by Thursday 9th. They can be given to Mrs. Mason in the library or the classroom teacher.

We appreciate you adding to our activity!

Jody Mason  
Library Media Specialist

## Valentine's Treat Guidelines

### Valentine's Treat Guidelines

**Please be aware that Valentine's treats will only be allowed during the Classroom Valentine's Celebrations. Student Valentine's, which are distributed among the classroom to be sent home, must not contain edible items.**

For Classroom Valentine's celebration treats, please be mindful that conversation hearts (see example) are **NOT** on the nut-safer list. There are currently no brands of conversation hearts that are viewed as nut-safer. However, acceptable alternatives that are on the nut-safer list include:

- Skittles
- Starbursts
- Smarties



- Sweet Tarts (Nestle brand)
- Fruit snacks (Motts or Annie's Homegrown brands only)
- Oreos
- Sweet P's Bake Shop Frosted Sugar Cookies (available at Hyvee grocery stores)

## Sunflower House

### Sunflower House

OTE is excited to welcome Sunflower House to our school on February 24th and 25th 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](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](mailto:eharsch@bluevalleyk12.org)

## BVUnmuted Legislative Podcast

### BVUnmuted Legislative Podcast

In the latest Blue Valley Schools' BV Unmuted podcast episode, Superintendent Dr. Tonya Merrigan discusses the upcoming Kansas Legislative session and the district's five priority positions with Board of Education members Gina Knapp and Jan Kessinger and Chief Financial Officer Jeremy McFadden.

To listen to the podcast episode, visit [www.bit.ly/BVPriorities](http://www.bit.ly/BVPriorities).

## Fostering A Safe School Environment

### Fostering A Safe School Environment

Blue Valley Schools is committed to promoting and fostering a safe environment in and around all of our schools. Through the convergence of physical and intellectual security measures, we are continuously working to prevent, mitigate, respond to and recover from a wide range of emergencies. Please check out [available ways to report safety concerns](#).

## Incoming Kindergarten Pre-registration

Dear Families,

We are excited to start welcoming our Kindergarten families for the Fall 2025. Children who reside in Blue Valley Schools and turn five by August 31 can attend kindergarten that school year. If you live within the Overland Trail Elementary boundaries and will have an incoming kindergarten student next fall, please complete the form linked below, Kindergarten Pre-registration (2025-2026)

to begin receiving communication directly through email and text from Overland Trail Elementary. Please be mindful that this form is not a completion of registration but an opportunity for us to communicate openly and begin preparing for online registration.

[Kindergarten Pre-registration \(2025-2026\)](#).

More information will be shared with you on Tuesday, February 18, including welcome videos, online registration instructions, and information about Kindergarten Kick-Off on April 11, 2025. Please pass this link on to neighbors who might not have a student in our system and still need to receive our weekly emails.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call the office at (913) 239-7000.

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.**

## 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

### 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



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

## Helpful Links

[School Supply Lists](#)

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

[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)

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

Phone: (913) 239-7000

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### Erica McDonald

Erica is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters