

Cougar Connect

August 25, 2023



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A Note From Mrs. McDonald

Dear families,

It was a pleasure being able to connect with you at Bak-to-School Night. Our staff appreciates your efforts to partner with us during your child's 2023-2024 school year. As we head into the last week of August, please be mindful of the following:

School Program Required Health Records

- All health forms must be completed and returned to the school nurse before the first day of school.
- **Failure to provide this documentation will result in the exclusion of the student from school beginning Wednesday, September 6, 2023.**

Conferences

It is time to sign up for fall conferences. We welcome all parents and caregivers to meet with their child's teacher to discuss progress thus far and plans for providing your child with a high-quality learning experience this semester.

Lunch

Visitors are welcome to eat lunch with students after Labor Day. A valid ID will need to be presented for entry.

Dismissal

Dismissal begins at 3:30. Therefore, we request that early releases be completed before 3:00 to avoid carline traffic and procedures.

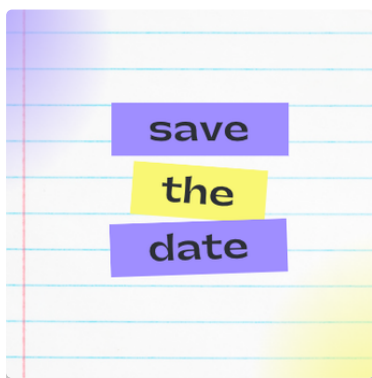
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

OTE is a special place due to our unique population of families from various cultures and backgrounds. The OTE community continues celebrating our diverse population and implementing measures to honor our cultural differences. As your school principal and a proud member of the district's board-appointed DEI Committee, I applaud our never-ending work, community compassion, and unwavering efforts to nurture an inclusive learning environment. As we continue to maximize our potential, please look for specially designed work created by our staff and families to support all families transitioning to OTE. Occasionally, this information is highlighted in the newsletter as "DEI Spotlight." You will see the first addition below.

Before you take off to read the remainder of the newsletter, our staff wants to thank PTO for the generous Sonic Happy Hour treat last Friday--we recognize your endless efforts and appreciate your generosity as we begin this new school year!

Sincerely,

Erica McDonald
Principal



Save-the-Date

Saturday, August 26: Restaurant Day at Yogurtini (11:00 AM-10:00 PM)

Sunday, August 27: Garden Club

Tuesday, August 29: Restaurant Night at Spin Pizza (4:00 PM-8:00 PM)

Friday, September 1: PTO Board Meeting (9:00 AM-11:00 AM)

Monday, September 4: No School | Labor Day

Tuesday, September 5: No School | Professional Learning

Friday, September 8: OTE Carnival (5:30 PM-8:00 PM)

Thursday, September 14: PTO Restaurant Night (4:00 PM-8:00 PM)

Wednesday, September 20: Picture Day | Individual and Classroom

Friday, September 22: Birthday Book Lunch

Monday, September-Thursday, September 28: Fall Conferences

Thursday, September 28: No School EC-8 | Parent-Teacher Conferences

Friday, September 29: No School | District-Wide Break



PTO Events | August



Fall Carnival

2 weeks until Carnival! Are you ready?

Grab your Carnival wristbands now! Perks to pre-ordering wristbands: discounted tickets, fast pass entrance, carnival t-shirt*, and swag bag.* Click to pre-order! [Overland Trail Elementary PTO - Carnival\(otepto.org\)](https://www.otepto.org).

*T-shirts and swag bags are limited to the first 400 student wristband orders.



Restaurant Day at Yogurtini

Saturday, August 26th - Restaurant Day at Yogurtini

11:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m. | 8941 W. 135th St, 66221

Cool off with a cool treat. Tell the cashier you're there to support OTE. 20% of all OTE sales will come back to support the PTO.



Sunday, August 27th - Garden Club Meet Up

9:30 a.m. at OTE | [RSVP HERE](#)

Join our new Garden Club for their first meet-up. They'll be pulling weeds & spreading new mulch. Coffee, juice, and donuts will be provided.

This is a great parent/child service opportunity, and students can earn volunteer hours for their time.



All Next Week - Stock the School Drive

Help OTE get ready for the year ahead. Bring in one or more items needed and have the kids drop them in the grey bin in the front hall.

Needs: Facial tissues (like Kleenex), Disinfectant Wipes (like Clorox), Staff Lounge needs (follow this [LINK](#) - these will be delivered to the school).



Restaurant Night at Spin Pizza

Tuesday, 8/29 - 4-8:00 PM

Dinner made easy. Tell the cashier you're there to support OTE. Or use code **giveback** for online orders.

A portion of OTE sales will come back to the PTO.

Welcome to OVERLAND TRAIL ELEMENTARY!

SCHOOLING: I received my Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from MidAmerica Nazarene University, my Graduate Certificate in Autism Spectrum Disorder from the University of Kansas, and I am currently completing my Master of Science in High-Incidence/Low-Incidence Special Education at Pittsburg State University.

NUMBER OF YEARS WORKING IN SCHOOLS: I worked as a paraeducator for 5 years and then returned to school to finish my degree. This will be my 4th year teaching.

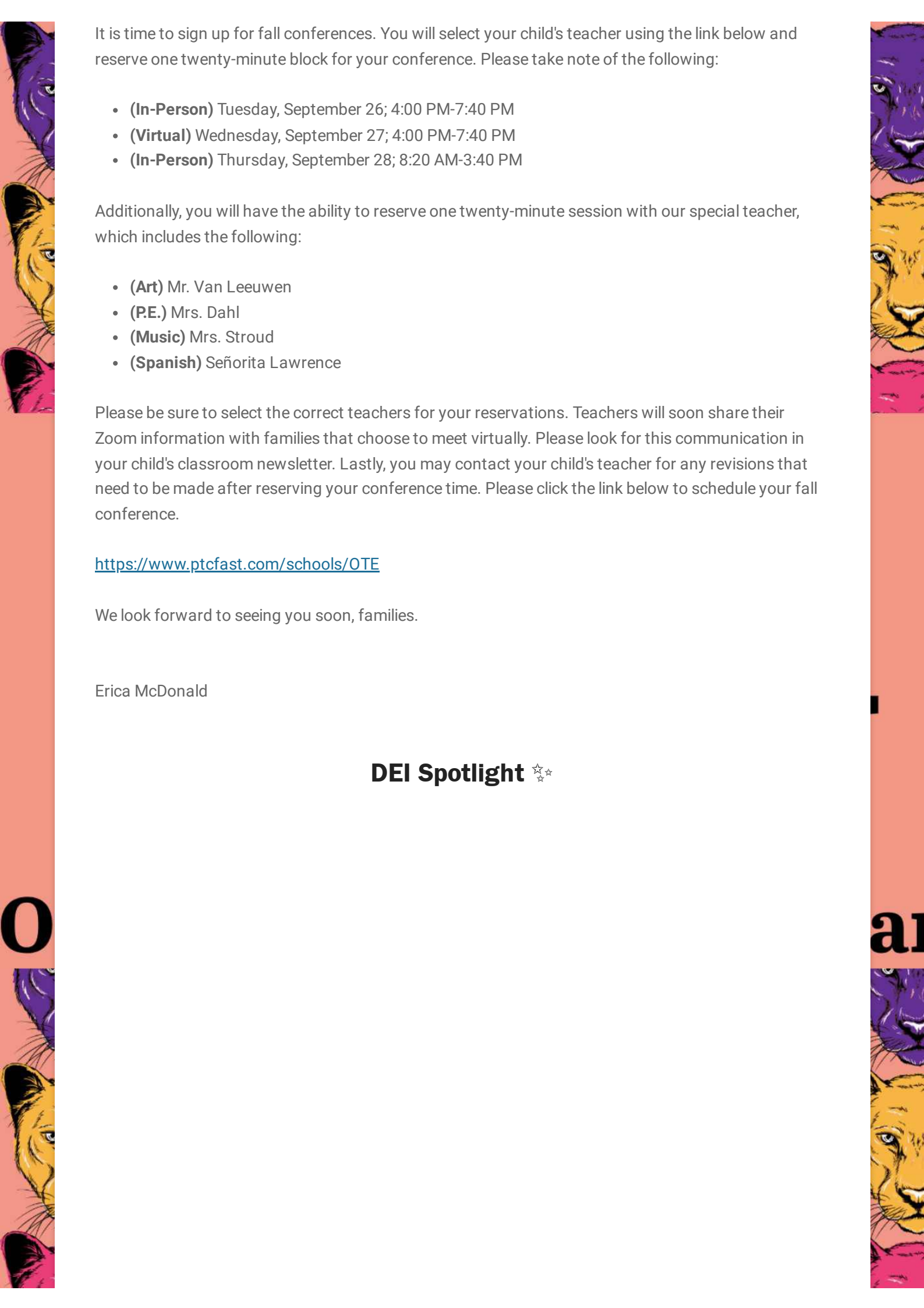
ROLE AT OTE: Interrelated Resource Teacher

FUN FACT ABOUT ME: In the last 18 months, I have been to 8 new countries (London, Ireland, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Iceland, Puerto Rico, Grand Cayman, and Dominican Republic).



Fall Conferences

Parents and Caregivers,



It is time to sign up for fall conferences. You will select your child's teacher using the link below and reserve one twenty-minute block for your conference. Please take note of the following:

- **(In-Person)** Tuesday, September 26; 4:00 PM-7:40 PM
- **(Virtual)** Wednesday, September 27; 4:00 PM-7:40 PM
- **(In-Person)** Thursday, September 28; 8:20 AM-3:40 PM

Additionally, you will have the ability to reserve one twenty-minute session with our special teacher, which includes the following:

- **(Art)** Mr. Van Leeuwen
- **(P.E.)** Mrs. Dahl
- **(Music)** Mrs. Stroud
- **(Spanish)** Señorita Lawrence

Please be sure to select the correct teachers for your reservations. Teachers will soon share their Zoom information with families that choose to meet virtually. Please look for this communication in your child's classroom newsletter. Lastly, you may contact your child's teacher for any revisions that need to be made after reserving your conference time. Please click the link below to schedule your fall conference.

<https://www.ptcfast.com/schools/OTE>

We look forward to seeing you soon, families.

Erica McDonald

DEI Spotlight ☆☆☆



Overland Trail Elementary

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Recap 2022-2023

Did you know that OTE is one of the most diverse schools in the Blue Valley School District? In addition to being a Title I school, OTE has students from 28 different countries who speak 29 different languages. Our unique population is something we value and celebrate at OTE!

During the school year, OTE's first DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) parents council was organized as a way for parents and caregivers from all backgrounds to provide input related to school events, activities, and day-to-day operations. This council is the first of its kind in the school district and we are excited to lead the way in building belonging!

Feedback was provided at the parents meetings held and an action plan was developed. This action plan included improvements within the school and PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) to foster a more inclusive community at OTE. The DEI action plan also included input from and is well supported by OTE administration, teachers, and staff.

From the action plan, the following has been implemented @ OTE during the 2022-2023 school year:

1. Create signage & videos

- Signs created to remind visitors to the school of photo ID requirement and how to buzz the office for entry.
- Indoor signage created to clearly label rooms and teacher classrooms in the building, with teachers photos also displayed for easy recognition by students and visitors.
- Video in process to demonstrate the process of drop-off and pick-up of students using the car lanes.
- Video in process to showcase what a typical day at school looks like as a help for newcomers and their families.

2. Create visual documents

- Documents created with images/pictures to better show/explain: school supply list, nut safer list, birthday treats allowed, bathroom expectations, parent-teacher conference expectations (as examples).

3. Newcomer transitioning

- Welcome process enhanced for new students through improvements to mid-year enrollment process.
- School supply packs available to teachers so they can easily prepare for new students who arrive mid-school year.
- Welcome Club created to leverage language and culture experience of older students at OTE to help newcomers, particularly those students who speak a language other than English at home.

4. Parents guide

- A guide is being created to help new families navigate the transition to schooling at OTE.

5. Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)

- PTO bulletin board featured a display "Say Hello Like a Cougar" which highlighted countries and languages represented within the OTE student population.
- Multicultural music was played at the Glow Party's and enjoyed by all in attendance at that event.
- PTO website updated to be more user friendly and accessible to all.

Exciting things are anticipated for the 2023-2024 school year for OTE. Expect to see the following and more:

- Goal of 100% participation in online PTO directory to help facilitate better communication between families (for play dates, parties, carpooling, sports coordination, etc.). Language information is one piece of information that will be requested so those that speak a language other than English can search and find others who speak the same language.
- WhatsApp groups by grade to facilitate more communication between parents and caregivers.
- DEI parent council to continue in its second year. Contact Melanie Shashindranath (melhart31@gmail.com) or Barbara Van Hamme (barbara_van_hamme@hotmail.com) if you are interested in participating for the 2023-2024 school year.
- Continued focus by the PTO to incorporate celebrations of diversity into upcoming activities and events.

Overland Trail Elementary is building belonging!



A Message from Mrs. Harsch, School Counselor

Hello, Overland Trail Elementary!

I hope you all had an enjoyable and relaxing summer. I am so excited to be back at OTE for year 2! For all the new families, OTE is a wonderful place to be! I believe in working together to ensure 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 as I said, this is my second year at OTE! I am from the Kansas City area and graduated from K-State with a degree in elementary education. I taught first grade for nine years before completing my master's in counselor from Fort Hays State. This is my 11th year in the Blue Valley School District! I am married and currently expecting our first child in October. I will be gone from October to January, but I will have a fabulous substitute counselor here.

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, classroom lessons, information services, and referral assistance to other programs and services in the community.

I am so excited to continue working with the amazing students, staff, and community members here at OTE!

I am here to help you and your children, and 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
913-230-7017



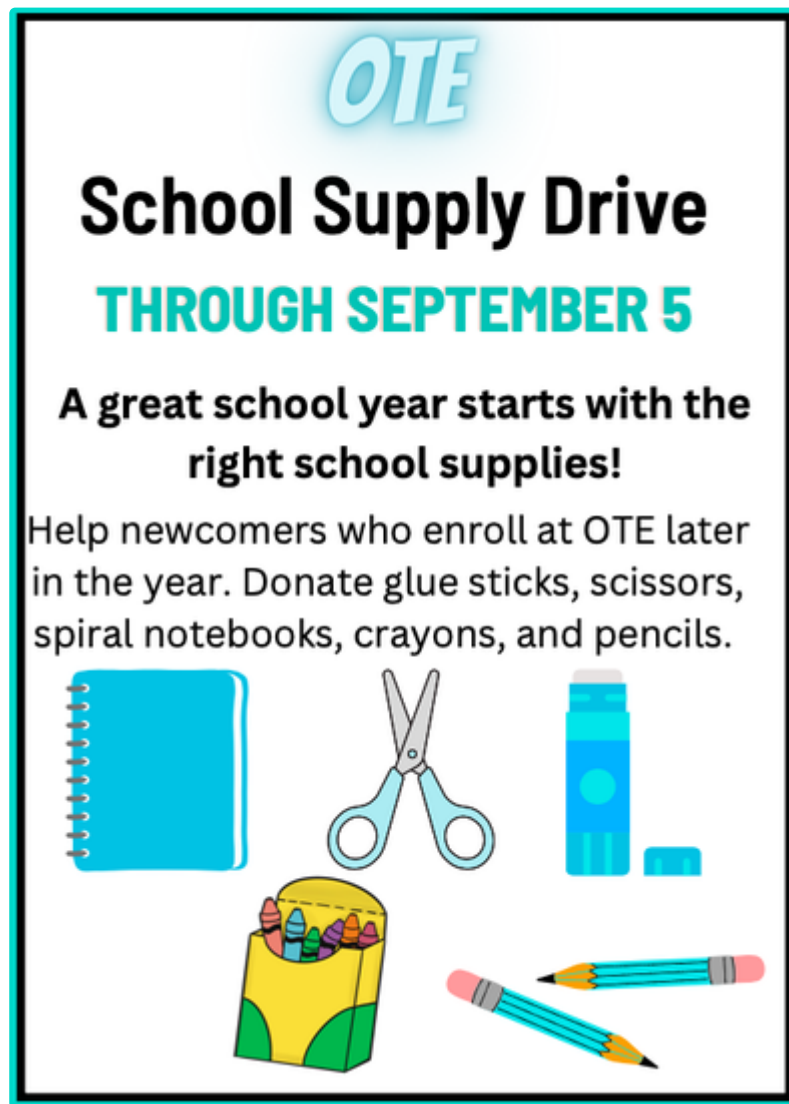
Student Code of Conduct

The Blue Valley Board of Education approved updates to Board Policy [3500](#) - Behavior and Discipline at the August 14, 2023 Board of Education meeting. As part of this approval, there is a [Student Code of Conduct](#) document. We ask all families and students within our school community to review the contents, policies, and procedures within this [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Administrative actions taken as a result of a violation of the code of conduct are determined following proper investigation, review, and/or consideration of the age/grade of the student, context, and situation in which the behavior in question occurred. The scope of authority of the Blue Valley Student Code of Conduct applies at all times when students are on school buses or other vehicles used by the district to transport students, school district property, or engaged in official school activities. Additionally, **this code of conduct applies to any student whose conduct at any time or place has a direct and immediate effect causing substantial disruption impacting the order of school operations and/or the sense of student and staff safety that exists in the school or school-related environment.**

Students at Overland Trail Elementary have been made aware of behavioral expectations and the Code of Conduct through grade-level meetings, class meetings, and school-wide assemblies.

School Supply Drive



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. Thanks for your help with this protocol 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

Important Travel Outside of the USA

This important message is for any family or staff that will **travel out of the United States** during the school year. Please [click here](#) to read the restrictions and recommendations for Out of the Country travel. Blue Valley resources such as Canvas, Classlink, and school email are not accessible out of the country unless you have a **personal device** with a **VPN** on it.

School Health Program Required Health Records

We welcome your child to the Blue Valley School District! Student health requirements are important as we partner with our families to create a safe and effective learning environment. All health forms **must be completed and returned to the school nurse prior to the first day of school.**

All students under nine years of age who are new to the state of Kansas are **required** to present documentation of a physical examination by an authorized health professional (K.S.A. 72-5214) that has been conducted no more than one year prior to enrollment. **Failure to provide this documentation will result in the exclusion of the student from school beginning Wednesday, September 6.** As an alternative to the required health assessment, a student may present:

1. A written statement signed by one parent or guardian that the child is an adherent of a religious denomination whose religious teachings are opposed to such assessments; or
2. A written statement signed by one parent or guardian that such assessment will be scheduled and completed within 90 days after admission to the school.

OTE | Title I School

August 31, 2023

Dear Families:

Overland Trail Elementary School has been identified as an official Title I school, based on the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch benefits. Title I is a federal program where select schools receive targeted funds to provide additional reading support.

Federal guidelines mandate that Title I schools provide parents with a “right to know.” As a parent, you have the right to know information regarding qualifications of your child’s classroom teachers. This information can be found at <https://appspublic.ksde.org/TLL/SearchLicense.aspx>.

As a parent, you also have the right to view both district and building report cards, which can be found by going to www.bluevalleyk12.org, scrolling down to “District Quick Links” and selecting “Accountability Reports.” Parents also have the right to request access to students’ state assessment scores. These will also be shared via the KITE Parent Portal around the end of the school year.

Thank you,

Erica McDonald

Principal, Overland Trail Elementary



Weekend Food Pack Program

To help alleviate food insecurity, Community for Kids partners with Overland Trail Elementary to provide one bag of non-perishable food items to participating children each week during the school year. Bag distribution will begin on Friday, September 1 and continue throughout the school year. Bags are typically distributed at school each Friday, except during breaks. Participation is free and optional. If you would like your child to participate and receive a weekend food pack, simply complete the brief online [form](#). No additional information is needed.

Contact Lacey Koester, school social worker, with any questions or concerns. She can be reached by phone at 913-239-7029 and by email at lkoester@bluevalleyk12.org.



Fifth Grade Strings | Join Now!

[Instrument Try-it Night](#)

[Fifth Grade Strings Enrollment Form](#)

[Blue Valley North Orchestras-5th Grade Corner](#)

OTE Library | "The family that reads together grows together." Carmela Dutra

Mrs. Mason is looking for pictures of you and your family reading together to include on a bulletin board across from the library. Email your pictures to jmason02@bluevalleyk12.org.

Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

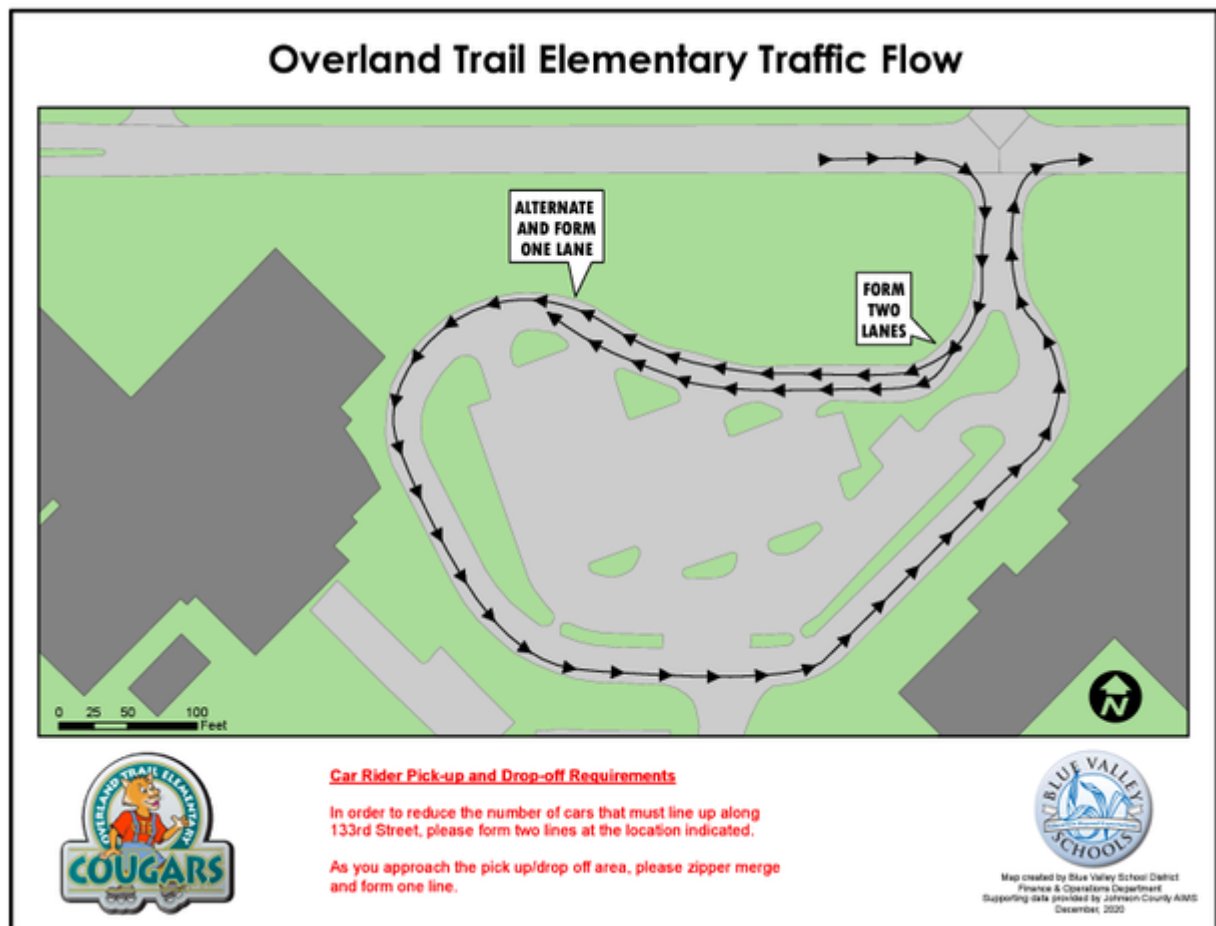
Arrival Procedures:

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. 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 3:30 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.



General Reminder for Visitors During the School Day

Parents and Caregivers,

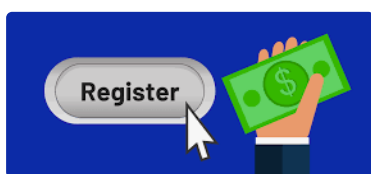
Our office staff wants to share a general reminder that all elementary schools in the district utilize the buzz-in entry system for visitors during the school day. Visitors will need to come to the front of the school. At the front entrance, visitors will press the buzzer, show government-issued photo identification, and state the purpose of their visit each time they visit the school. **If you arrive without identification, the office will seek the administration's approval for entry.**

We ask that guests not hold the door open for another visitor once they have been buzzed in. Instead, allow the door to close for visitors to go through the above-mentioned procedures. We appreciate the support of our safety procedures.

Overland Trail Elementary will open for visitors after Labor Day beginning Wednesday, September 6, 2023.

Thank you,

Erica McDonald



Registration and Fees | 2023-2024

Parents and Caregivers,

[Elementary school registration](#) for the 2023-24 school year is open and [online now](#) for all students. Registration is required annually and is the time to update your child's information and pay fees. Completing registration confirms that your child will attend school for the 2023-2024 school year. Thank you for providing important information as part of the registration process. For more registration information, visit www.bluevalleyk12.org/registration.

Thank you,

Yolonda Merritt
Registrar
(913) 239-7000



Calling all Blue Valley Kindergarten parents and caregivers!

BV Well and Blue Valley School Counselors, Social Workers and Psychologists invite you to a complimentary session designed especially for Kindergarten parents and caregivers that will address:

- expected **social and cognitive milestones** for 5 and 6-year-olds and why thinking about **screen time** is important at this age
- the **number one parent factor that fosters child wellbeing** and what you can do to build and sustain it
- **digital health and wellness** practices for your family

Featuring:

- **Dr. Libby Matile Milkovich, MD**, Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrician, Children's Mercy Kansas City
- **Screen Sanity**, an international nonprofit whose family-education programs help parents consider the role technology plays in their lives and connect with their kids in meaningful ways

Scan to register online for
**Starting Strong:
Kindergarten Edition**
Space is limited - register today!



Register now!

Scan to purchase Screen Sanity's
**Elementary School Plugged-in
Planner**. Books will also be
available for purchase at the event.



Screen Sanity's presentation sponsored by:



Birthday Policy

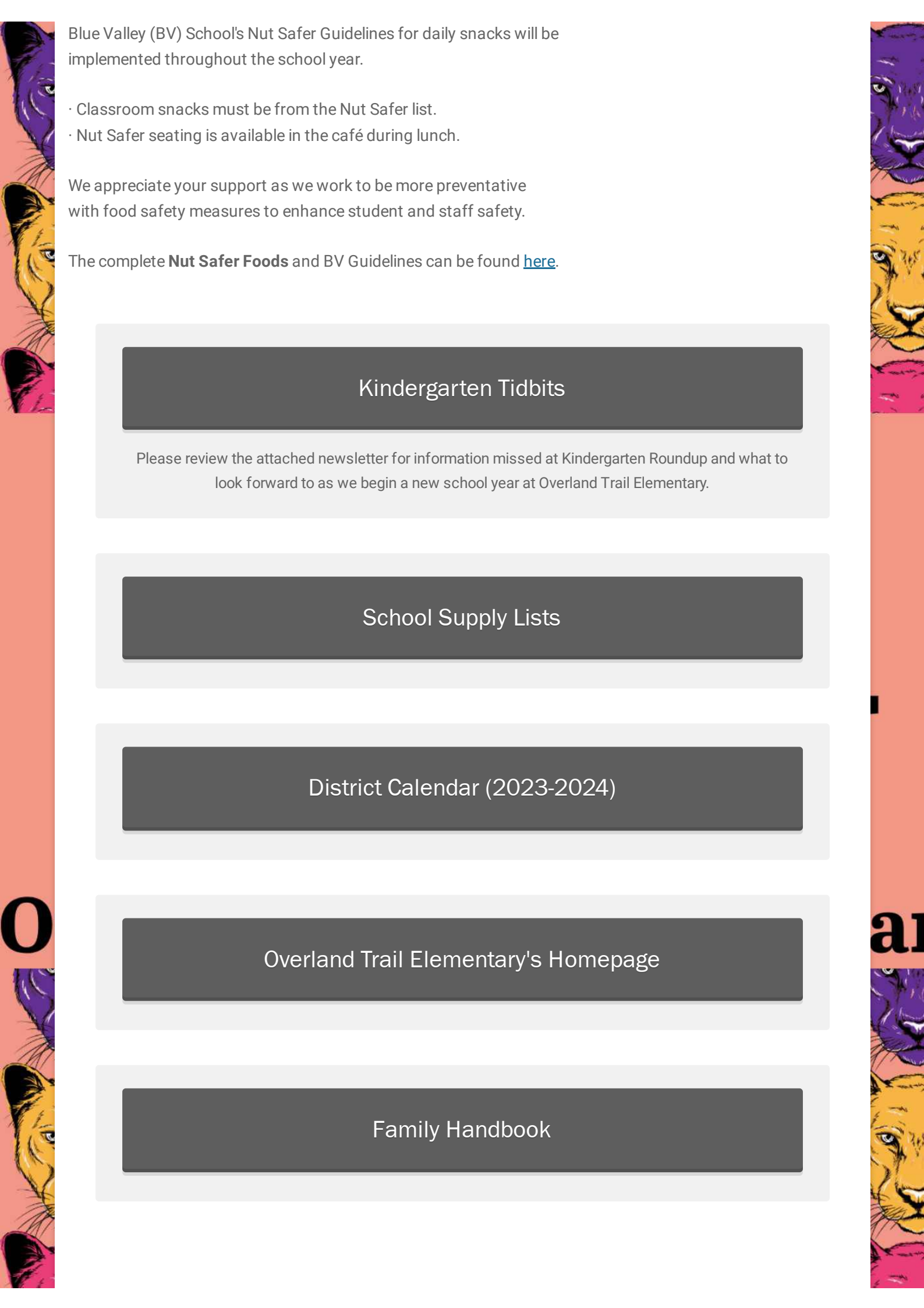
Due to the growing number of food allergies and medical needs of students, OTE has a **non-edible** treat policy. Students may bring non-edible birthday treats (e.g., pencils, stickers, etc.) per arrangement with the classroom teacher. Remember that a birthday celebration should not take away from instructional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

Kindergarten Tidbits

Please review the attached newsletter for information missed at Kindergarten Roundup and what to look forward to as we begin a new school year at Overland Trail Elementary.

School Supply Lists

District Calendar (2023-2024)

Overland Trail Elementary's Homepage

Family Handbook



Erica McDonald, Principal

 @OTEMcDonald

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6225 West 133rd Street, Overla...

✉ ECMcDonald@bluevalleyk12.org

☎ (913) 239-7000

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Alicia Anderson, Assistant Principal

🐦 @OTEAnderson

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✉ ARAnderson@bluevalleyk12.org

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🌐 bluevalleyk12.org/OTE



Office Staff

🐦 @OTECougars

- Robin Warren, Administration Assistant/Bookkeeper
- Yolonda Merritt, Administration Assistant/Registrar
- Debby Alexander, Attendance

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🌐 bluevalleyk12.org/OTE

Family

Overland Trail Elementary

