

# Cougar Connect

September 1, 2023



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## A Note From Mrs. McDonald

Dear families,

We shared another successful week at OTE. Before you take off for an extended weekend, please be sure to read below, as there is important information that you will not want to miss.

### Help Wanted at OTE

We are currently hiring for a Lunchroom/Copy Aide. This individual would help support students during lunch while nurturing a calm, safe, and enjoyable dining experience. The position is Monday-Friday, 10:45-1:45. If you are interested, please don't hesitate to let me know--we'd love for you to join our OTE staff.

### Carline Dropoff and Pick-up

- Dropoff: At dropoff, please be sure not to leave your car or allow your child to exit the car through the inside lane. For efficiency and safety, our staff will help all students exit their vehicles through the outside lane, which is the sidewalk that leads to the front entrance of the building.
- Pick-up: Please avoid the car loop until 3:15. If you arrive sooner than 3:15, park in the lot south of OTE. This will allow middle school parents to access their car line for student pick-up.

### 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.

### 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.

I hope you enjoy a nice, long weekend, families!

Sincerely,

Erica McDonald  
Principal



## Save-the-Date

### September

**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)

**Wednesday, September 20:** Picture Day | Individual and Classroom

**Friday, September 22:** Birthday Book Lunch

**Monday, September 25:** PTO Restaurant Night at Freddy's (4:00 PM-8:00 PM)

**Tuesday, September 26-Thursday, September 28:** Fall Conferences

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

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

### October

**Friday, October 6:** PTO Board Meeting; 9:00 AM-10:00 AM

**Wednesday, October 11:** PTO Community Service

**Friday, October 13:** No School | End of Quarter 1

**Tuesday, October 17:** PTO Restaurant Night

**Friday, October 20:** Skate Party at Skate City; 5:00 PM-7:00 PM

**Tuesday, October 24-Thursday, October 26:** Scholastic Book Fair

**Tuesday, October 24:** Family Night; 5:30 PM-7:30 PM

**Thursday, October 26:** Donuts with Grownups; 7:15 AM-8:15 AM

**Tuesday, October 31:** Fall Celebration; details to come at a later date





## Fall Carnival | September 8, 2023

### We still need volunteers!

The Carnival is our biggest event of the fall and it cannot happen without help from our OTE grown-ups. There are still many volunteer slots that need to be filled, with our biggest need being help manning all the fun stations, inflatables and activities. Our volunteer sign up is laid out in shifts so you're able to help AND enjoy the Carnival with your kids.

[CLICK HERE TO VOLUNTEER](#)

### 3 Days Remaining to Pre-Order Wristbands

**Everyone** attending needs a wristband (family and preschool wristbands are free). Pre-ordering student wristbands **saves you money** and gets you access to the Fast Pass Entrance. The first 400 student wristband orders also receive a Carnival t-shirt and swag bag.

[ORDER WRISTBANDS & MEAL TICKETS HERE](#)

### Candy and Pop Bottle Donations

The Candy Walk and Pop Bottle Ring Toss are returning to the Carnival this year and are two of the students' favorite activities. We're looking for candy and 2-liter pop bottle donations, as well as monetary donations to fund the activities. If you are able to donate in any of those ways, we would greatly appreciate it. Sign up to bring candy/pop bottles or donate funds by visiting the Carnival Donation store on our PTO website.

[DONATE HERE](#)

**Welcome to**  
**OVERLAND TRAIL ELEMENTARY!**

**SCHOOLING:** University of Kansas

**NUMBER OF YEARS WORKING IN SCHOOLS:** 10 years, this year

**YOUR ROLE AT OTE:** Kindergarten Teacher

**FUN FACT ABOUT ME:** I love to travel!





## Children's Mercy--Powering Families Webinar

Each month, Children's Mercy will offer a free online educational event to provide parents and caregivers a chance to connect with Children's Mercy Kansas City experts on a variety of topics. Each event will include information about a specific topic followed by questions from attendees submitted via chat. Each event will be presented monthly at 12:00 noon. Webinar topics will include: healthy eating, financial resources, anxiety and depression, kids' safety and more! In order to participate, participants will need access to the internet and a phone/tablet/computer. These webinars are free, but registration is required. If families cannot attend virtually at noon, the webinar will be recorded and posted on the [Powering Families homepage](#) for later access.

These webinars are free, but [registration](#) is required. Once you have [submitted your registration](#), you will be emailed the link to join the event.

Upcoming sessions:

- Healthy Eating & Lifestyles - Recording Available!
- Supporting Your Child through a Mental Health Crisis - Tuesday August 29, 2023 12-1pm
- Kids and Internet/Social Media - Wednesday September 20, 2023 12-1pm
- Preventing Unintentional Childhood Injuries – Tuesday October 24, 2023 12-1pm

To access the full list of recordings, view all upcoming webinar topics, or register for a session, visit the [Powering Families webpage](#).

## Assessment Changes

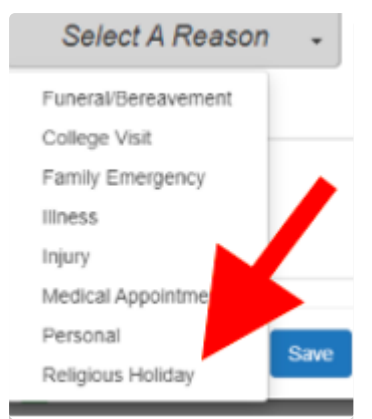
As seen in the annual assessment notice shared last week, there are some changes to student assessment in Blue Valley this Fall. As a result, you may notice a change in some of the tests your student is being asked to take this year. Here is a little more detail on these changes.

We have replaced MAP reading testing with the Fastbridge aReading assessment. The benefits are:

- Fastbridge testing provides comparable student results with fewer questions.
- Teachers get information that is easier to act upon.
- Fastbridge is endorsed by the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE).

We have also eliminated MAP math testing. The benefits are:

- Starting last year, we asked students to complete iReady diagnostic testing as iReady became our math resource for grades K-5.
- Last fall and spring, we double-tested students in math as we administered both MAP math and the iReady diagnostic in both terms.
- Through analyzing results, we learned that iReady and MAP produced similar overall information. In other words, the correlation between iReady and MAP data was extremely strong.



## Reporting Religious Absences

Did you know? Families can select "Religious Holiday" as an option for a child's absence in ParentVue, when applicable. This notation could be helpful to our school staff so they can plan accordingly for your student's absence.

## 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 (melhart81@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](mailto: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

OTE

## School Supply Drive THROUGH SEPTEMBER 5

**A great school year starts with the  
right school supplies!**

Help newcomers who enroll at OTE later  
in the year. Donate glue sticks, scissors,  
spiral notebooks, crayons, and pencils.



### 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.

### 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](http://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



## **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](mailto:jmason02@bluevalleyk12.org).



### 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:



## 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](#).



School Supply Lists

District Calendar (2023-2024)

Overland Trail Elementary's Homepage


Family Handbook



## Erica McDonald, Principal

 @OTEMcDonald

 6225 West 133rd Street, Overla...

 ECMcDonald@bluevalleyk12.org

 (913) 239-7000


 bluevalleyk12.org/OTE




## Alicia Anderson, Assistant Principal

 @OTEAnderson

 6335 West 135th Street, Overla...

 ARAnderson@bluevalleyk12.org

 (913) 239-7000

 bluevalleyk12.org/OTE



## Office Staff

 @OTECougars

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

 6225 West 133rd Street, Overla...

 (913) 239-7000

 bluevalleyk12.org/OTE

# full of family

## Overland Trail Elementary

