

# INSIDE



SHAWNEE MISSION SCHOOL DISTRICT

FALL 2023



> Roesland Elementary Named a 2023 Blue Ribbon School

> Dr. Hubbard Named 2024 Kansas Superintendent of the Year

> Middle School Sports Programs Set to Expand





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ON THE COVER: Isabel Bevis, a seventh grader at Indian Woods Middle School and Reagan Brown, Westridge seventh grader, compete in a middle school cross country meet.

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#### INSIDE

Shawnee Mission School District  
8200 W. 71st Street  
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Inside Shawnee Mission School District is published by the Communications Team in the Shawnee Mission School District.

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# The Hub

Updates from Superintendent Dr. Michelle Hubbard

One thing I'm sure about as Superintendent of the Shawnee Mission School District is that when we work together as One Shawnee Mission, we help our students shine. Throughout this issue of Inside Shawnee Mission, you will see much to be proud of that our students and staff have accomplished in the first part of this school year.

And even as we celebrate our accomplishments, we are also always looking toward the future in Shawnee Mission. As 2024 begins, Shawnee Mission will begin updating the Strategic Plan, and we encourage our entire community to engage in the process. This plan will serve Shawnee Mission for 2024-2029. The success of this plan depends on broad community input, as well as individuals willing to serve on committees and action teams. I thank everyone for thinking about how they might contribute to our next Strategic Plan update, and for their ongoing commitment to our schools.



Dr. Michelle Hubbard

## Ways to Engage in the Strategic Plan Cycle II Update!

Consider applying for the Steering Committee or an Action Team. Applications to serve on the Steering Committee open on January 4, 2024 and will remain open through January 12, 2024. Action Teams will be established in early March 2024.

The Steering Committee represents school and district communities, oversees the work, and develops the core elements of the Strategic Plan. Action Teams will develop action plans to support district strategies and objectives.

Watch for Strategic Plan Cycle II information and updates on [www.smsd.org](http://www.smsd.org)

Watch a video to learn more about the process by scanning the QR code.



## Assessment Success

This fall, Kansas Commissioner of Education Dr. Randy Watson announced Kansas state assessment results are the highest since 2017. We join in the excitement for this statewide accomplishment. In our district in 2023, we've also seen an increase in students scoring at or above "effective" and "excellent" in both math and English Language Arts (ELA). Additionally, there is a decrease in the percent of students scoring at "limited" ability in math and ELA. We celebrate every gain because it highlights the tremendous dedication of our teachers, students, and community here in the Shawnee Mission School District.

## National Merit

In early November, Shawnee Mission formally recognized all of the students who were named semifinalists in the 2024 National Merit Scholarship Program. They are among 16,000 semifinalists named, who represent less than 1 percent of United States high school seniors. We congratulate all of these students, their schools, and their families on their success! They include:

### Shawnee Mission East

Aanya Bansal  
Mitchell Blair  
Kael Mercer  
Katherine Murphy  
Nina Yun

### Shawnee Mission Northwest

Theodore Ohly  
Samuel Wilson

### Shawnee Mission South

Emma Krueger  
Mariana Mullarney  
Luke Pickert



## Podcast

This fall our district launched a new podcast: Shawnee Mission Mic'd Up. Each episode shines a light on the people who make us One Shawnee Mission. The podcast explores a wide variety of topics, including school spirit, our newly rebuilt Pawnee Elementary School, and the district's commitment to inclusive playgrounds and opportunities. New episodes are released every other Thursday and individuals can subscribe and download wherever they get their podcasts. Visit [www.smsd.org/information-central/micd-up](http://www.smsd.org/information-central/micd-up) for links to the newest episodes!



## Read Across SMSD



Shawnee Mission encourages reading for all ages through Read Across SMSD. In November, Shawnee Mission welcomed Myltin Bighorn, a graduate of the University of Kansas and member of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes. He joined host Kaitlin Shulman, diversity, equity, and inclusion coordinator, and Shawnee Mission South High



School students Prince Miller and Ava Harris for a discussion focused on learning more about Indigenous Peoples. We thank NEA-Shawnee Mission for their ongoing partnership and the Shawnee Mission Education Foundation for providing students in all of our schools with Read Across SMSD books. 📖



# Roesland Elementary Named a 2023 Blue Ribbon School

*Students and staff at Roesland Elementary have a big reason to celebrate.*

This fall, Roesland Elementary was awarded the prestigious National Blue Ribbon Schools designation by the U.S. Department of Education. The school was one of only four schools in the state of Kansas and 353 schools across the country to receive the honor. The recognition is based on a school's overall academic performance or progress in closing achievement gaps among student groups on assessments. The designation is a testament to the school's dedication to providing an exceptional education to students.

"The honorees for our 2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools Award have set a national example for what it means to raise the bar in education," noted U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona in a release. "The leaders, educators, and staff at our National Blue Ribbon Schools continually inspire me with their dedication to fostering academic excellence and building positive school cultures that support students of all backgrounds to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally."

Principal Kelly Swift expressed her gratitude to staff, students, and the Roesland community for this outstanding achievement.

"I am tremendously proud of Roesland Elementary School," said Swift. "I am so fortunate to be in a position to see how our staff, families, and students work together to achieve success every day. It really gives us an opportunity to celebrate and show how we shine."

The recognition of Roesland's strength came as no surprise to sixth grader Ryder MacMillan.

"I've been here since kindergarten and every teacher that



I've had has been amazing. We are a really good school. We are proud Panthers and we are the best school in Kansas," shared MacMillan.

Roesland was honored as "An Exemplary High Performing School," a designation for schools that rank among the top performers in their state, as measured by state assessments or nationally normed tests.

Superintendent Dr. Michelle Hubbard also congratulated Roesland for this impressive achievement.

"This is absolutely something to celebrate across our entire Shawnee Mission community," expressed Hubbard. "This award considers many aspects of the school including student engagement, culture, and academics. Roesland's excellence in every area shines through. We are so proud of Roesland and all of the work students, families, and staff have done to ensure high levels of learning for every student daily and an overall outstanding student experience."

Located in Roeland Park, Roesland Elementary has a rich history dating back to 1873 when it first opened as a one-room schoolhouse. The school currently serves over 350 students. Roesland previously earned a Blue Ribbon Award in the 1993-1994 school year. ♦



## Dr. Hubbard Named 2024 Kansas Superintendent of the Year

This fall, Dr. Michelle Hubbard was named the 2024 Kansas Superintendent of the Year, the first Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) superintendent to receive that honor.

The Kansas School Superintendents' Association selected her following a multi-round process, which began with 16 candidates and culminated in individual interviews with the three finalists. These interviews were conducted by a panel of five former Kansas Superintendents of the Year.

"Leaders who can calm the noise and make learning real for the kids - that's who we like to celebrate," explained G.A. Buie, executive director of United School Administrators of Kansas. "Dr. Hubbard epitomizes what that goal is. The growth for everyone, the success for everyone, and helping everyone truly find their own way to shine."

In honoring Dr. Hubbard, the selection panel commended her for relentless dedication to student success, specifically noting her commitment to increasing student attainment of Market

Value Assets (MVAs). MVAs are industry-recognized skills that can help students be prepared as they transition from high school to postsecondary education or the workplace. Before 2021, fewer than 30% of students were graduating with an MVA. In 2021, this figure increased to 40%, and this past year rose to 47%. This year, the district goal is to have 60% of seniors graduate with an MVA.

Dr. Hubbard was appointed superintendent of the Shawnee Mission School District in 2021. Prior to becoming superintendent, Dr. Hubbard served for five years as the associate superintendent of leadership and learning and for a year as deputy superintendent. She was superintendent in the Turner School District for seven years.

One of Dr. Hubbard's best qualities is her ability to interact with students, said Sophie Lewczenko, a Lenexa Hills fifth grader.

Lewczenko first became acquainted with Dr. Hubbard through a classroom letter-writing project, and later as a student interviewer at the 2022 Shawnee Mission Education Foundation Fall Breakfast.

"She always listens and talks to me and has the heart for making a connection with students," Lewczenko shared. "She likes helping everyone and is a very good person to talk to if you want someone to listen."

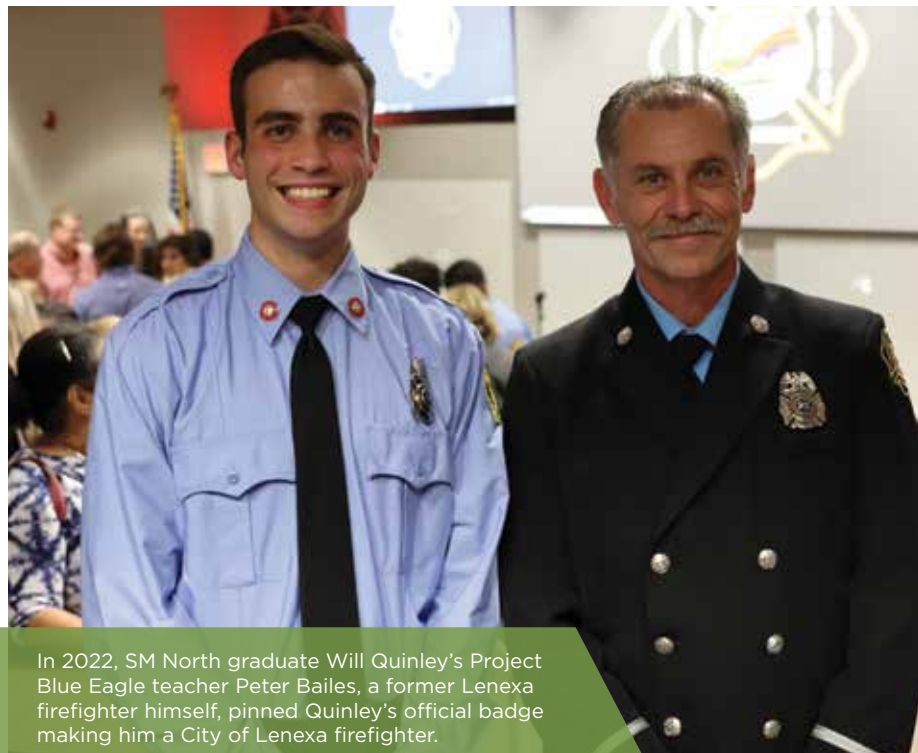
Upon receiving the recognition, Dr. Hubbard expressed her gratitude.

"I am truly honored to be recognized by my peers for my work as Superintendent in the Shawnee Mission School District," she expressed. "There are so many great superintendents in the state advocating for kids every single day; I feel so grateful to be included on this list. Every day I feel fortunate to come to work with the amazing students and staff in my community. I hope this recognition shines a spotlight on all the incredible work happening in Shawnee Mission and across the state to support student achievement and make our public schools great places to learn."

As Kansas Superintendent of the Year, Dr. Hubbard will represent Kansas as a National Superintendent of the Year nominee. Finalists will be announced in January. ♦



# Realized! Students Find Personal Success through Real World Learning



In 2022, SM North graduate Will Quinley's Project Blue Eagle teacher Peter Bailes, a former Lenexa firefighter himself, pinned Quinley's official badge making him a City of Lenexa firefighter.

senior year with HNTB. As an intern, he was able to help the firm with projects in progress, including one for the South Lawrence Trafficway in Douglas County. "What made it valuable was I got to do what civil engineers were doing," Boyd explained. "I can't think of a better opportunity at such a young age."

The internship went so well, he was invited to continue working for the company as he began college. Boyd felt so strongly about the impact of this opportunity, he attended an expo held by the Shawnee Mission School District to encourage other students to consider this path.

"It was a wonderful full-circle thing," he said. "This is one of the best opportunities you could be offered because you gain practical work experience."

For students like Annaliese Nguyen, internships provide a chance to gain valuable experience even if it is not directly related to a chosen career path. Nguyen is a 2023 Shawnee Mission Northwest graduate studying biochemistry on the pre-med track at the University of Kansas. While in Shawnee Mission, Nguyen served as an intern for H&R Block.

"Having an internship in high school helped me polish up my professional networking skills that are crucial to college and the real world," Nguyen reflected. "It also helped me learn how to thoroughly organize my schedule and prioritize things in an orderly fashion. I would 100% recommend any other high school student to have an internship if possible."

As she has advised students like Nguyen, Erica Jablonski, Real World Learning Counselor at SM Northwest,

Learning opportunities are already helping hundreds of students achieve their personal best.

"It is incredible," Britt Sherer, Shawnee Mission North Real World Learning Counselor shared. "Our students who are going through some of these experiences are showing us that they are ready for the real world."

## Internships

For some students, internship experiences help solidify their future plans. Wyatt Boyd, a 2023 Shawnee Mission North graduate, is now studying civil engineering and planning at UMKC, following an internship his

said students always gain skills by the end of their Real World Learning experience.

"Whether it is professionalism, industry-specific skill, program-specific skill, self-advocacy, or people skills, they always make positive gains," Jablonski shared. "It's amazing to witness the transformation of our students."

## Industry-Recognized Credential

After graduating from Shawnee Mission North in 2020, Will Quinley pursued a career in firefighting. He earned an industry-recognized credential, Basic Life Support Training (BLS), along with numerous real-world skills during his time in the Shawnee Mission Project Blue Eagle law, fire science, and safety Signature Program.

Now, he serves the Lenexa Fire Department, responding to accidents, house fires, and medical calls in the community.

"I love it," Quinley says about his career in emergency response.

The practical skills he gained in Shawnee Mission and later at Johnson County Community College gave him what he needed to get ready for his future, he shared.

"I learned a lot and possibly the most helpful thing is to always try your hardest and keep on pushing forward," Quinley added. "It might take you 50 times to get it right, but you will eventually get it right."

In 2022, Quinley's Project Blue Eagle teacher Peter Bailes, a former Lenexa firefighter himself, pinned Quinley's official badge making him a City of Lenexa firefighter. Shawnee Mission graduates like Quinley have provided multiple benefits to the Lenexa Fire Department, according to fire chief Travis Vaughn. The Project Blue Eagle Program has been helpful for growing talent at a time when application rates are lower than what they used to be. It also has trained students for skills the department needs.

"We need people with great firefighting skills and we also look for skills like character and what drives them," Vaughn said. "To have Shawnee Mission share that talent with us is very import-

ant in the highly competitive situation we are in."

## Entrepreneurship

Through Real World Learning, Carson Drake is building his business "Drake's Lawn and Landscape" while completing his senior year at Shawnee Mission South High School.

He started lawncare work while in middle school, but is now applying the entrepreneurial skill he is gaining as a student to help local lawns, and his client base, grow.

His school helped connect him with a local mentor who owned a similar business for decades, who provides advice. During the day, he is also able to spend time focusing on requests and appointments, managing a small staff, and carrying out lawn services in the community.

"This is so helpful for people like me who want to go into the workforce," Drake shared. "I enjoy being self-employed and a chance to line up jobs and figure it out. It is a learning experience. One of the biggest satisfactions I get from this experience is seeing people's faces at the end of a full landscaping remodel. This is a great experience that all schools should offer."

## Client-Connected Project

During freshman year, an English Language Arts (ELA) project at Shawnee Mission South got Savannah Ryan thinking about opportunities she had never considered before. In spring 2023, her class worked on a project to help address lifeguard shortages the City of Overland Park faced with its swimming pools.

"This opportunity is one of the best things to ever happen to me in school," Ryan expressed. "I had always thought that ELA would only involve reading and grammar. It was really cool to apply old skills and learn new ones to fix a real problem in my community."

While she is currently undecided on future plans, Ryan said this experience has had a tremendous impact on what she is exploring.

"It made me want to become more involved in clubs and anything that requires verbal presentation," Ryan shared. "I have become very interested in

trying to be involved in city council when I am eligible. I hope wherever I go it involves Real World Learning." ◆



SM South senior Carson Drake is building his business "Drake's Lawn and Landscape" while earning an MVA in entrepreneurship.



Annaliese Nguyen, 2023 SM Northwest graduate, served as an intern for H&R Block and after earning her diploma began studying Biochemistry at the University of Kansas.

If your business is considering internship opportunities for high school students or has a project where feedback and problem-solving from high school students would be helpful, please contact Laura Harsch, business to education program officer at [lauraharsch@smsd.org](mailto:lauraharsch@smsd.org) or 913-993-9367.





Left: Indian Hills' Ella Wiebe and Libby Fitzpatrick cross the finish line at the district championship.

## Middle School Sports Programs Set to Expand

As fall sports wind down and the winter season ramps up, hundreds of middle school students are already looking forward to the spring, when Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) kicks off its inaugural middle school soccer season for both boys and girls.

"I'm so glad that they have soccer now," said Westridge seventh grader Cassandra Wendel. Like many students, Wendel has been playing soccer on private teams and clubs for nearly a decade. But with the addition of a middle school soccer program, they will now have an opportunity to play with their classmates on a public team.

"It gives all of our students an opportunity to do something school-related," explained SMSD's director of athletics and activities, Kent Glaser. "If it's not school-related, then there are places that kids can get involved, but not everybody has the same opportunities as those with the means to do so. So, this gives everybody an equal opportunity once they hit seventh grade."

In addition to providing equal opportunities for SMSD students, the expansion is also expected to help students finish the school year academically strong, shared Linda Miesner, associate principal at Westridge Middle School.

"We typically see our kids, usually in the spring, struggle with motivation on grades and behavior," Miesner explained. "We believe part of this is because [athletics] used to end in February. We know that the more kids are involved in school, the better they're going to do, the more ownership they're going to feel, and so now that we've got another

option for these kids, I think it's going to make a huge difference."

The middle school sports expansion plan was approved by the board of education in March 2023 and includes eighth grade football, set to begin in Fall 2024.

Prior to this plan, SMSD was one of two 5A/6A districts in the state to NOT offer a middle school football program.

"We're excited about the opportunity to be able to offer something very similar to all of our surrounding schools and the rest of the state," said Glaser. "Our high schools are excited about it, I think our community is excited about it, and, I know our current seventh graders are excited about this opportunity, because they'll get to be the first ones this next fall."

Student interest is already apparent. Westridge has about 80 students (who had not participated in sports before) already signed up for soccer, and about 40 new students showing interest in football. Miesner says she thinks those numbers will increase once the seasons get closer.

"We've got about 44% of our kids involved in an extracurricular activity," said Miesner. "And so, we're hoping that this will get at least half our kids involved."

For more information about try-out dates, schedules, and mandatory health forms, please visit the district middle school sports page by scanning the QR code. ♦



## Pre-K and Kindergarten Enrollment in the Shawnee Mission School District Begins January 8, 2024

Watch [www.smsd.org](http://www.smsd.org) for more information



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Students and families outside the new Pawnee Elementary School.

# Fostering Inclusion in Shawnee Mission Schools

## SMSD STRONG Strong Schools, Strong Community

### Pawnee Elementary Begins a New Chapter

The first day of the new school year held an extra air of excitement for Pawnee Elementary students as they entered their newly rebuilt school for the first time.

Walking up the front path, students were welcomed by Pawnee Elementary educators and cheered on by the Shawnee Mission West cheer team. The Pawnee mascot, “Paws the Panther” gave high-fives to students as they crossed through the front doors before making their way through shiny new spaces.

Sixth grader Coralynn Moffitt expressed her appreciation for the thoughtfulness of the design.

“It’s big and modern, and I love that so much about it!,” shared Moffitt. “They added tables everywhere and lounging places in every hallway. The gym has bleachers now, which I think is a really good touch.”

This project, funded with proceeds from a \$264 million bond referendum approved by voters in January 2021, is

one of the latest in a series of renovations aimed at revitalizing the district’s school buildings.

The new Pawnee features flexible learning spaces for student collaboration, a covered outdoor classroom, rooms full of natural light, and an overall design theme based on nature.

The design theme came from early visioning meetings with the community, staff, and architects, explained school secretary Debbie Garren.

“Our community has dreamed of a new Pawnee for many years. The community’s support has been wonderful,” expressed Garren.

Principal Kari Otero is excited to see the creative ways teachers and students will use the new collaborative spaces.

“It is the most amazing building, we’re so blessed, so lucky to have this learning space,” shared Otero. “I really think this will put us in a situation where we can be a lot more innovative.”

Pawnee Elementary is the third

elementary school to be rebuilt as a result of the bond. A new Westwood View Elementary and John Diemer Elementary opened in August 2022 and January 2023, respectively. Rushton Elementary is currently under construction and Tomahawk Elementary will be rebuilt starting in 2024.

To learn more about school rebuilds and other bond projects in the Shawnee Mission School District visit:

[www.smsd.org/bond-2021](http://www.smsd.org/bond-2021). ♦



Students play on inclusive playground equipment at Bluejacket-Flint Elementary.

Shawnee Mission is committed to inclusion. This commitment can be seen in the Strategic Plan, as well as in the installation of inclusive playgrounds at the district’s elementary schools.

Inclusive playgrounds bring children of all abilities together, promote understanding, and create a place where everyone can be included, have fun, and make friends, according to Sherry Dumolien, chief of special education.

“It’s impactful not only for students who have disabilities, but it’s also impactful to their peers,” shared Dumolien. “I hope our students take away that no matter the circumstances, we can create opportunities to include all individuals and engage, interact, and gain friendships that would have been potentially limited before.”

Inclusive playgrounds are equipped with features like ramps and wide paths for children who use wheelchairs or have limited mobility. They have swings with special seats, communication boards with icons and simple visuals, or sensory elements that enhance communication and accessibility. The January 2021 referendum outlined a plan to install an inclusive playground at every elementary school in the district. The goal is close to being achieved, shared superintendent Dr. Michelle Hubbard.

“We’re proud that 31 of our 34 schools have inclusive playgrounds and we will continue that progress,” stated Hubbard. “We want to ensure that every student feels like they belong, has an equal opportunity, and that all kids can play.”

#### Joining the Inclusion Revolution

SMSD’s commitment to inclusion doesn’t stop at playgrounds. The district recently celebrated a generous grant of \$25,000 from Variety KC, a local nonprofit organization



dedicated to helping children with disabilities.

This grant has helped to fund adaptive equipment throughout the district that will improve accessibility to sports and games for students with disabilities. The equipment will be used during recess and physical education classes.

The grant was accepted by a small group of Shawnee Mission students and staff at an event at Lenexa Hills Elementary. During the event, students demonstrated how the equipment can be used to make baseball, golf, and hockey more inclusive and accessible. “We are so appreciative of this grant and the opportunities it will provide for all students in our school district,” stated Hubbard. “It’s inclusion at its finest, and provides the opportunity for all kids to feel included and part of every school community.”

To watch a video of the event, scan the QR code to the right. ♦





# Celebrating Five Years of Scholarship Shawnee Mission

This September, the Shawnee Mission Education Foundation celebrated the fifth year of Scholarship Shawnee Mission by bringing more than \$3 billion in scholarship offers to Shawnee Mission students.

Scholarship Shawnee Mission is a Foundation program that matches Shawnee Mission high school juniors and seniors with college scholarship offers before they've even applied to those schools.

Each year, the Foundation presents the offers to students at celebrations held at each high school in the district. After receiving individual offers, students are encouraged to meet with college representatives who are on-site to recruit Shawnee Mission students.

Students' families opt into the program by completing online verification forms allowing student information to be shared with higher education institutions. Participating colleges and universities then make scholarship offers to students who match their criteria.

Program officer Edward Márquez shared that the program began with the simple idea that bright and hardworking students should be recruited by colleges in the same way student-athletes are recruited.

"We believe colleges should be competing for our students, and by bringing the offers directly to our students we can help open up possibilities that some students could never have dreamed of."

With every passing year, Scholarship Shawnee Mission continues to raise the bar. When the program began in 2019, it had 27 college partners and the total number of scholarship dollars offered was \$737 million. This year, the program boasts 45 college partners and the total number of scholarship dollars offered to students was over \$3 billion.

The numbers are truly stunning, but the most profound part of the program's growth is how it positively impacts students, shared Kim Hinkle, executive director of the Shawnee Mission Education Foundation.

"It's really about expanding opportunities for everyone and helping our students succeed on their chosen path," expressed Hinkle.

Five years in, Scholarship Shawnee Mission continues to



Above: The Shawnee Mission Education Foundation Board holds a banner celebrating \$3 billion in scholarship offers. Below: SM Northwest students visit with a college representative.

shine. Moving forward, the goal is to expand further, using technology to link a greater number of Shawnee Mission students to postsecondary options and ensure that opportunities remain accessible to all.

By offering early insights into scholarships and future opportunities, Scholarship Shawnee Mission will continue to empower students and families to make informed decisions that will lead to a bright future.

The Shawnee Mission Education Foundation's mission is to advance scholarship and leadership, to enable all Shawnee Mission students to achieve their potential. To learn more about the Foundation visit: [www.smef.org](http://www.smef.org).



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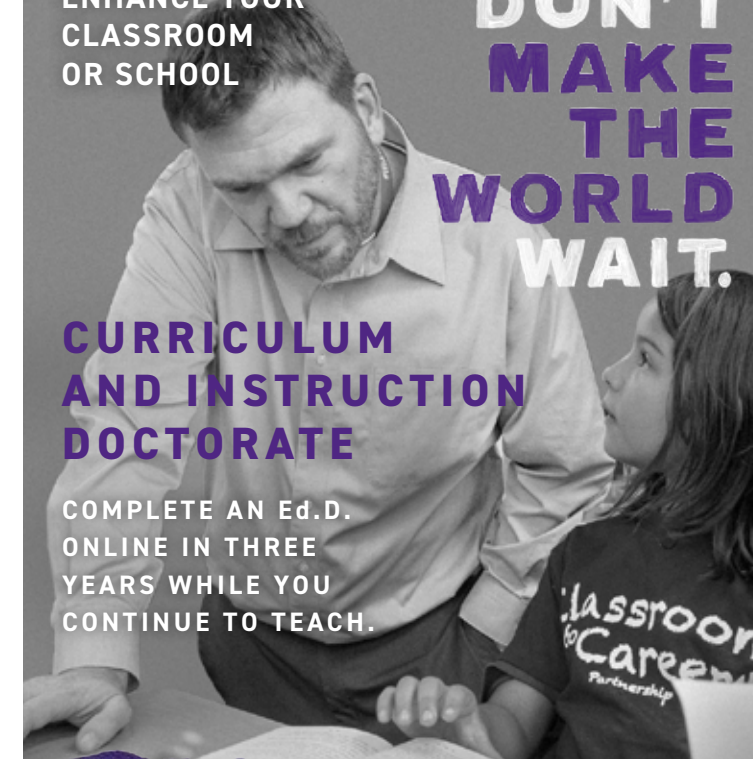
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