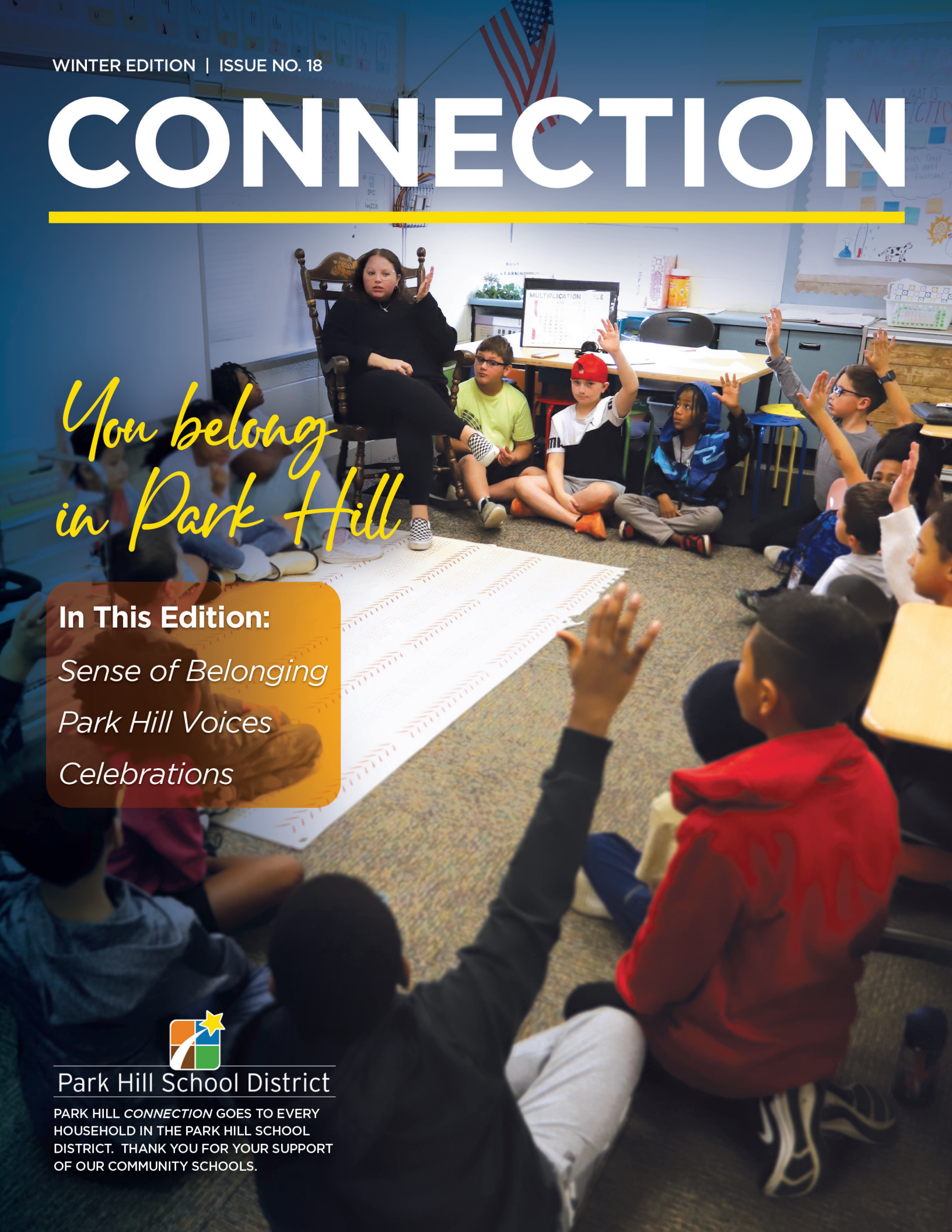
WINTER EDITION | ISSUE NO. 18

CONNECTION



You belong in Park Hill

In This Edition:

Sense of Belonging

Park Hill Voices

Celebrations

Park Hill School District

PARK HILL *CONNECTION* GOES TO EVERY HOUSEHOLD IN THE PARK HILL SCHOOL DISTRICT. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF OUR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS.



Straight from the Superintendent

The winter chill is settling in and as we approach the winter break for our community, I'm feeling gratitude and a sense of accomplishment for our students, families, staff and community. Over the course of this first semester, we've engaged with over 3,000 pieces of feedback in our Park Hill 2034 long-range planning process. From surveys to community meetings to staff chats to team conversations, we've heard many voices contribute thoughts about the next 10 years in Park Hill School District. We'll continue to seek your feedback as we move into exploring options and adopting the best plan for our school district in the spring. We have important and exciting decisions ahead!

This edition of our *Connection* magazine features stories about what it means to belong in Park Hill. The culture objective of our newest strategic plan says that we will create an environment where all students, staff and members of the Park Hill community feel a sense of belonging. This means that we're constantly working on intervention systems, restorative practices, well-being for students and staff, social emotional learning, DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging) initiatives, and community engagement.

Thank you for helping us create a sense of belonging in our community. Each one of us contributes to the overall feeling of connection to our schools and community. We're so glad you're part of our community where we build successful futures, each student, every day.

Michael J Kimbrel

Dr. Mike Kimbrel
Superintendent

Welcome to the *Connection*!

Connection is a publication of the Park Hill School District, distributed quarterly, without charge, to patrons within the Park Hill School District boundaries. Our magazine format launched in the fall of 2022.

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SCHOOL SNAPSHOTS:

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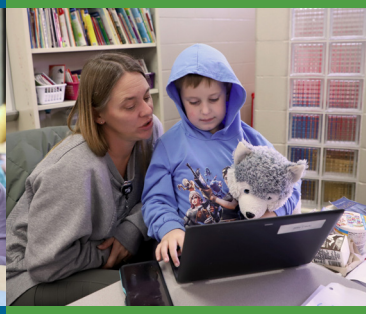
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CULTURE

Create an environment where all students, staff, and members of the Park Hill Community feel a sense of belonging.



Belonging in Park Hill

Belonging means feeling connected, accepted and included in a group, community or environment. It's important for people to feel like they are a valuable part of something bigger than themselves. But what does it mean to belong in the Park Hill School District?

Belonging is part of our current Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP). To build successful futures for Park Hill students of all backgrounds, creating an environment where all students, staff and members of the Park Hill community feel a sense of belonging is essential.

To make this a reality, the CSIP team considered our strengths, including our work in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) and Culturally Responsive Education (CRE). They also acknowledged challenges, including staff and student well-being.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

Established in 2021, the DEIB Council continues its work and is implementing DEIB Councils in every school. The Council will announce the first Park Hill School District DEIB Champions at our Hall of Fame event.

In addition, we recently had our first community learning session on Restorative Practices with Collaborative School Culture (CSC). CSC helps schools improve culture, climate and student behavior. This allows teaching and learning to remain the focus.

The CSC team gave a detailed introduction to restorative practices during the webinar. These practices have been used worldwide to build connections between people, including students and adults in school communities.

As CSC co-founder Karen Salama McCain explained, restorative practices emphasize working together to build relationships and community.

"Doing things *with* people, rather than to them, leads to happier, more productive and more cooperative people," Salama McClain said.

We will have more community learning sessions as we implement Restorative Practices district-wide next year. You can learn more about upcoming sessions on the district website.

Culturally Responsive Education

Since 2015, we've studied CRE and the work of Zaretta Hammond. Hammond is a former classroom English teacher whose primary work has been linking instruction, equity and literacy for more than two decades. Administrators and teachers across the district have had training on this important framework.

In 2019, Southeast Elementary staff completed a study of Hammond's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*.

"At first, it was, 'How can we bring all of our students' backgrounds into the classroom?'" Lindsey Stevens, second grade teacher and member of Southeast's CRE team, said. "How can we take what we know about students, cultures and learning and bring it into how we teach?"

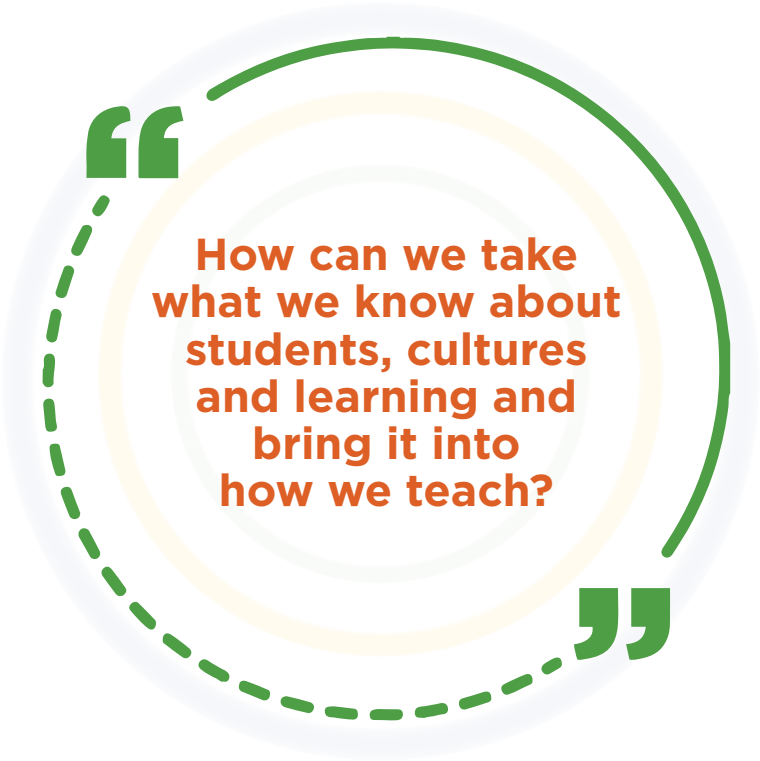
But when the pandemic hit, and students had to learn online, it became clear that not all students had access to what they needed to be successful.

"It brought home how important it is for teachers to educate all students, regardless of background," she said. "And meeting every student's needs while bringing students' lived experiences into the classroom," she added.

Well-Being

A safe and caring learning environment for our students is a key requirement for the district. Our Student Well-Being Center recently opened inside the new Academic Services Center in Zona Rosa. The center offers wrap-around services for all students, including the district's first school-based mental health therapist. Learn more about her on page seven.

Taking care of our staff is equally important. By helping employees lead healthy, balanced lives, we not only support the people who make our district a success, but we also increase Park Hill's performance, decrease absenteeism, and manage health costs for employees and the district.



The district provides wellness and employee assistance programs to support staff and their families in maintaining physical, social and emotional health. Offerings include access to a fitness center and exercise programs, health screenings and coaching and counseling services.

Belonging is about connection, acceptance and sharing our identity in different settings. When everyone in the Park Hill community feels valued and heard, it enhances the quality of education in our schools and paves the way to successful futures for each student every day.

Please keep reading to learn straight from two of our students about belonging in Park Hill.

Straight From Our Students

Alejandra Raus Oscasio, 5th Grader, Tiffany Ridge Elementary



Park Hill: What do you like best about your school or classroom?

Alejandra: How we can always find ways to have fun while learning, and no one gets left out.

PH: What activities at school make you feel like you're part of your classroom community?

A: P.E. because there are many activities. So if you are not good at one thing, you can always wait for a new subject.

PH: How do you and your classmates work together to make everyone feel included?

A: If someone feels left out or if someone does not have a partner in a group then a lot of people will come over to them and try to be their partner.

PH: How does it make you feel when you help a classmate?

A: I feel accomplished and proud. It gives you a feeling in your heart that you are doing something good and it makes you want to do it again.

PH: How do you feel when your teacher or classmate helps you?

A: I feel like I can trust them. If I didn't know someone and they helped me, then I can know they are a good person and most likely I want them to be my friend because who doesn't want more friends?

Straight From Our Students

Brandon Lallana, Freshman, LEAD Innovation Studio

Park Hill: LEAD offers a unique 1-to-1 mentoring program. What impact does your mentor have on your sense of belonging and well-being at school?

Brandon: I think my mentor helps me with my sense of belonging because Mrs. Seymour is someone I can talk to, and I know she is always there for me. Because I know my mentor is there for me, it makes me feel like I am part of the school.

PH: How does it feel knowing your mentor is there for you?

B: It's a lot different than before I got to LEAD. Instead of a teacher I really like who I can ask about work and assignments, I have someone I can really talk to. Like last year, I had a teacher I really liked for Life Education, but I only got to see her every other day. At LEAD, I get to see my mentor every day, and I know that if I had any issues, not just at school but at home, my mentor would be there for me. I can talk about anything with my mentor ... and not just me, but other students can, too.

PH: How important is a sense of belonging to you at school?

B: I think every school needs to have a sense of belonging. If you don't have that, you kind of feel like the odd one out, and like there is no place for you. I think a sense of belonging is the most important part of school, even more important than grades. Because if you feel like you don't belong, then you basically feel worthless or like the school isn't the right fit. And if you feel like you are out of place, it makes it hard to care about activities and schoolwork.

PH: Are there other activities or projects that make you feel like you're a part of the LEAD community?

B: Yes. Right now, in my Emerging Leaders class, we are working on a project that involves teamwork and other students' collaboration. We are trying to figure out a holiday project that gives back to the community, and we are all researching and working together to decide what we will do. It really inspires me to be with other students in this way and makes me feel like I am part of something special. And this makes me feel like I belong here at LEAD because I'm with other students working together for a goal.

PH: How does a sense of belonging affect your overall well-being and mental health?

B: This is an interesting question because if you have a sense of belonging, you don't really have to think about it. If you have a sense of belonging like I do at my school, when you wake up in the morning, you're excited and ready to go. At LEAD, I know when I get there, I have a community waiting for me who will be there with open arms.



Straight From Our Staff

Kristen Dua, School-Based Mental Health Therapist, Student Well-Being Center



Park Hill: As the district's school-based mental health therapist, what does "a sense of belonging" mean to you?

Kristen: A sense of belonging means feeling understood and totally accepted by the people and space around me, where I am free to be myself and know that I matter. There is a connection to something bigger and a high level of trust that contributes to a sense of felt psychological safety. One of the special parts of being a therapist is being able to provide an environment that is physically and emotionally safe and always communicating a message of acceptance and belonging. This allows a student to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences without concern about a reaction, and that's different than most other situations or experiences in society. My motto has always been, "Be the reason someone feels seen, heard and respected."

PH: What factors at PHSD contribute to your sense of belonging?

K: I'm so grateful for the sense of belonging that I've felt joining Park Hill School District. Everyone has really shown a warm welcome, appreciation and excitement for this new position in the district – as well as what I uniquely bring to this role with my experience and ideas. It's refreshing to be part of a school district that has not only defined belonging but embodies it in shared advocacy, respectful communication, collaboration, high expectations and trust on all levels. I've experienced this from our Park Hill School Board and Superintendent to teachers and all those doing the work every day at the building level. It's more than words; it's daily evidence of the culture index of our comprehensive school improvement plan to create an environment for all to feel a sense of belonging.

PH: Why is a sense of belonging important (to students, staff, everyone)?

K: A sense of belonging and connection is a basic human need that has helped humans survive over generations, so when we feel that we belong and are valued in that context, we can move beyond surviving and thrive! I am a big fan of neuroscience, and Zaretta Hammond says it best in her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain*: "The brain feels safest and relaxed when we are connected to others we trust to treat us well." When students, staff and everyone are connected on this level of feeling unconditionally accepted, this creates safety where they can feel more comfortable to take appropriate risks and challenges to continue to grow. Creating genuine feelings of belonging is critical for improving engagement in learning and performance in academics and life in general.

PH: How does a sense of belonging affect overall well-being and mental health?

K: Human beings are hard-wired for connection, and I really believe we all want to be understood. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we need to feel accepted and understood by those in our close circles to be our best selves. This acceptance impacts our thoughts, emotions and behaviors. When we feel significant and feel that we belong, then we have the freedom to explore ourselves and a sense of responsibility to make changes as needed. There can be various mental health challenges that can impact our sense of belonging and connection to others. Having a sense of belonging can help us cope more effectively with stressful times in our lives, and thankfully, we have some control in our lives to strengthen our sense of belonging.

PH: How do you foster a sense of belonging with the students you work with?

K: Nurturing belongingness means I get curious about what my students are interested in so I can build an understanding. I try to be mindful with each interaction to show students that they matter. I wait to greet them with a smile at the Student Well-Being Center upon arrival. I physically move to be on their level. I try to match their energy and create opportunities to laugh. I also model that we all make mistakes and mistakes are proof that we are learning, and we are learning together.



Olivia the Intern

This is my page to highlight my semester-long internship as a Graphic Design intern in the Communications Department!

My name is Olivia Goins, I am a senior at Park Hill South High School, and I am a Professional Studies Intern at the District Office. The Professional Studies program gives students meaningful connections for our future careers and tries to guide students down the right path for their careers. Due to our professional abilities, connections with employers and experiences, students who participate in Professional Studies will have an advantage when applying to colleges and jobs. It is a great way to learn proficient qualities that will help all of us in the future. I want to go to college for graphic design and marketing and my internship has familiarized me with creative software setting me up to be successful.

At the Park Hill District Office, I am located in the Communication Services office. I started by working on social graphics and e-news graphics for the District. All my tasks were given to me daily on a project management website called Asana. I would work on them and then submit them for feedback. This helped me learn and understand layout and composition while helping me develop my communication and critical thinking skills. It was easy for me to work with the team, as they were very welcoming and easy to talk to. I have gained experience in working in a positive and professional environment which has equipped me to be more motivated and to engage with the team here. I got the opportunity to sit in a meeting which showed me how well the communication team works together and how organized a workplace has to be.

I've spent my time either working in the conference room or working with Quinn, the graphic designer on the team. When both of us are free, Quinn spends time teaching me new techniques in Illustrator. This is beneficial to me as I gain an understanding and acquire skills in Illustrator as many graphic designers use it in the professional world.

Some projects I have worked on are the Park Hill Trobots Craft Fair graphic, the LEAD Parent Information Night graphic, the Girls Swim and Dive Coach of the Year graphic and the fall Park Hill South Choir Concert program cover. I have learned about the creative process, inflating shapes and letters, optical art and this *Connection* page. I have learned so much from working here for three months and I'm glad I could spend my time with these amazing people.



This is a fish I painted on Photoshop software

Park Hill Celebrates Success Around our District

These are just a few of the awards and accolades Park Hill staff and students have received recently. Visit **www.parkhill.k12.mo.us/news-and-stories** to catch up on the latest honors and accolades.



National Merit Semifinalists

Congratulations to Park Hill South High School seniors **Kaden Culbertson**, **Isaac Dierker, McKelvey McDaniel, Sylvia Nguyen and Rohan T. Venkatesh** and Park Hill High School/LEAD senior **Luis Tercero** for being selected as Semifinalists in the National Merit Scholarship Program.

More than 1.3 million students from 21,000 high schools entered the nationwide contest, and these five students are among approximately 16,000 semifinalists who have the opportunity to compete for 7,140 National Merit scholarships worth nearly $30 million this spring.

National Merit Commended Students

We are #ParkHillProud of the eight Park Hill School District seniors who were named Commended Students in the 2024 National Merit Scholarship Program.

Congratulations to **Elisha-Daniel Agbor, Ethan Hurd, Lauren Oakley, James Barrie, Jessica Yu and Tyler Dinh** of Park Hill High School and to **Olivia Clemons** and **Austin Felton** of Park Hill South High School. They are among 34,000 students nationwide being recognized for their exceptional academic promise demonstrated by their outstanding performance on the qualifying test used for program entry.





KC Scholar Awards

Congratulations to the eight Park Hill School District students receiving $50,000 awards from KC Scholars! The students were honored with a concert from Tech N9ne and an announcement by Eric Stonestreet, all televised on *Good Morning America* from Union Station.

We are #ParkHillProud of Park Hill High School seniors **Liam Funk, Hilina Ayenew, Julian Marquez, Hawra'a Hassan, Maleia Sheets and Eden Alemayehu** and Park Hill South High School seniors **Rahel Tareke** and **Joel Barraza**.



2024 Under Armour Next All-American

Congratulations to Mason Love, punter/kicker on the Park Hill South Football Team. Love was named a 2024 Under Armour Next Football All-American! Love received his honorary jersey during a pep rally this fall.

The 16th Under Armour Next All-America Game, high school football's premier all-star showcase event, will feature more than 100 of the nation's best senior high school football players on Jan. 3, 2024, in front of a national audience on ESPN.

Love plans to attend and play for the University of South Carolina next year.



Project ADAM

Congress Middle School, LEAD Innovation Studio, Line Creek Elementary and Park Hill High School have joined Hopewell Elementary as Project ADAM certified schools! Each school has a Cardiac Emergency Response Team (CERT) and has implemented emergency response drills in their buildings. We are on track to have every school Project ADAM certified by 2025.



MASC Northwest Administrator of the Year

Congratulations to Park Hill High School Assistant Principal Dr. Corey Willich for being named the Missouri Association of Student Councils' Northwest Administrator of the Year! He'll be recognized at the MASC State Convention next year.



2024 Best Middle Schools

U.S. News and World Report ranked all four of our middle schools as 2024 Best Middle Schools. They all placed among the top 40% of middle schools in the state.

NOMINATE A
PARK HILL STAR

Anyone can nominate an employee at **parkhilllistens.com**.

Our employees are the reason we are so successful here in the Park Hill School District, and we would like to recognize them for all they do for our students.

That is why we present the Park Hill Star award once a month to a pre-K or elementary teacher, a secondary teacher and a support employee.

Visit the district's Facebook page to see December's Park Hill Star winners.

You invest in our students

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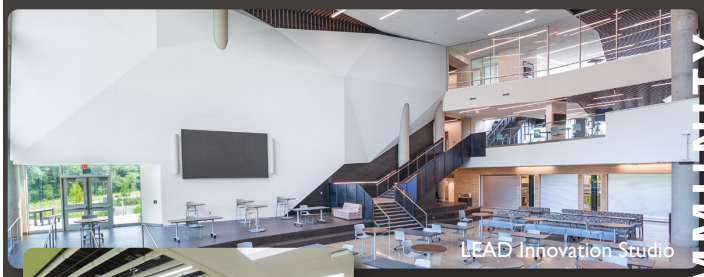

Todd DeMint


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Park Hill Highlight

Seniors at Park Hill High School, Park Hill South High School and LEAD Innovation Studio took part in the seventh annual Scholarship Initiative event. The program's goal is to expand the number of institutions to which our seniors apply to find their best fit. The seniors were all surprised with scholarship totals this fall. Altogether, the students received $315 million in scholarships. #ParkHillProud

For more moments like this, be sure to follow our social media channels on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X) and YouTube.

