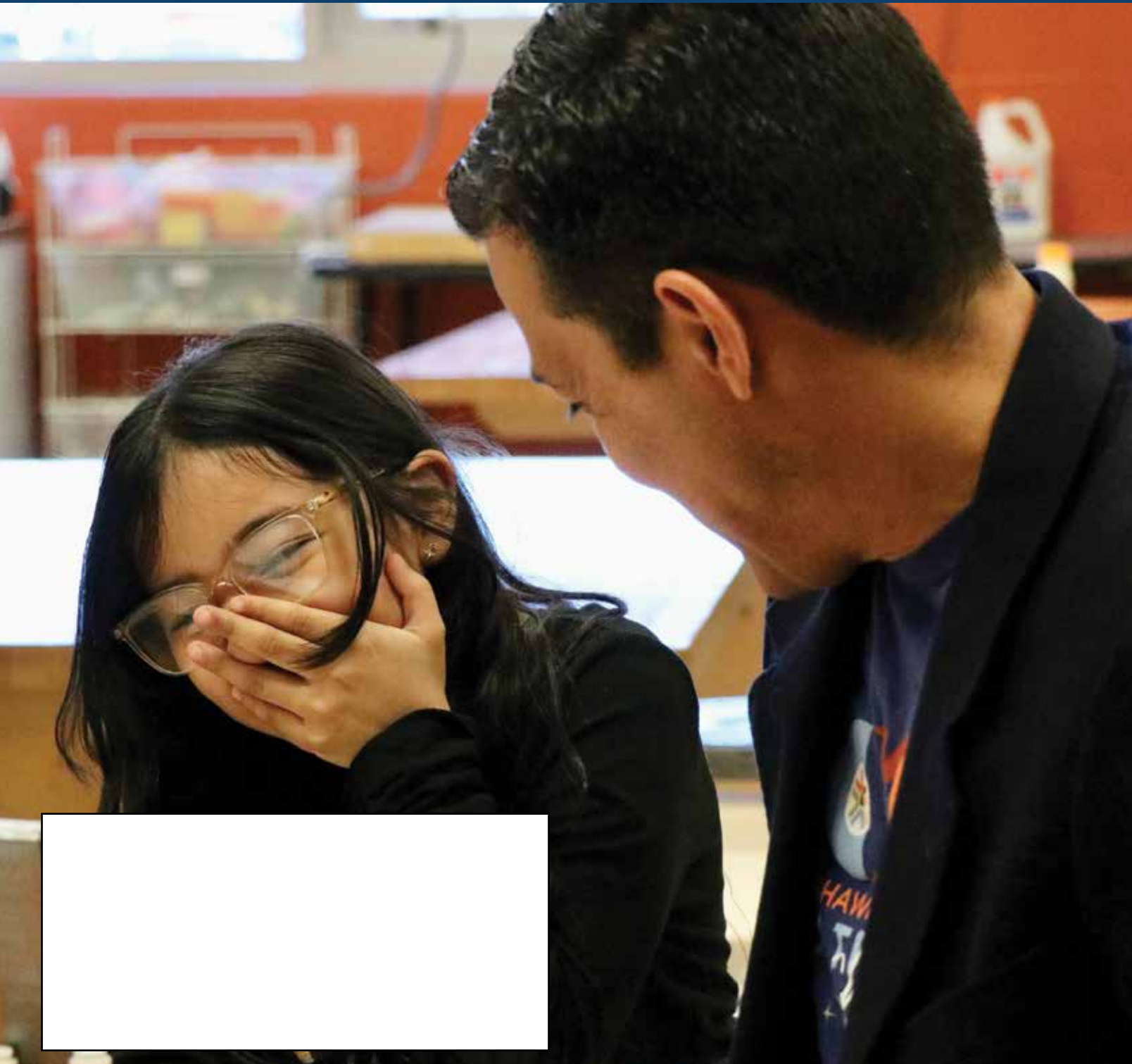


# INSIDE



SHAWNEE MISSION SCHOOL DISTRICT

SPRING 2024



> Meet Our New Superintendent

> Summer- A Time for Learning in the SMSD

> Special Education - A Part of Making Us ONE Shawnee Mission

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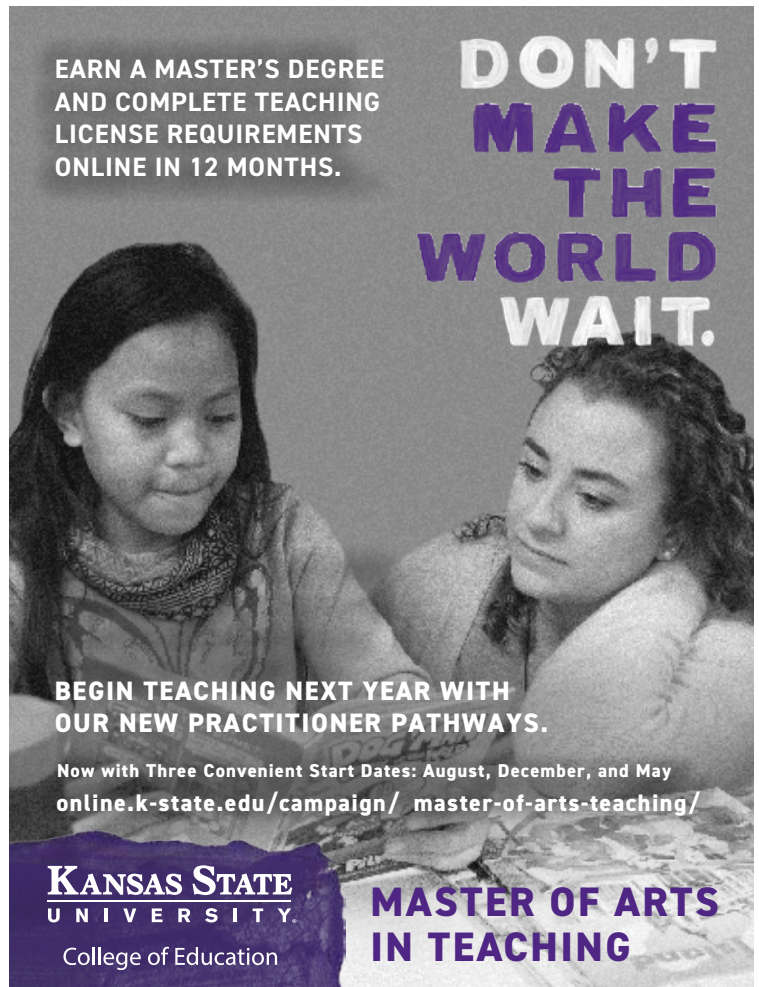
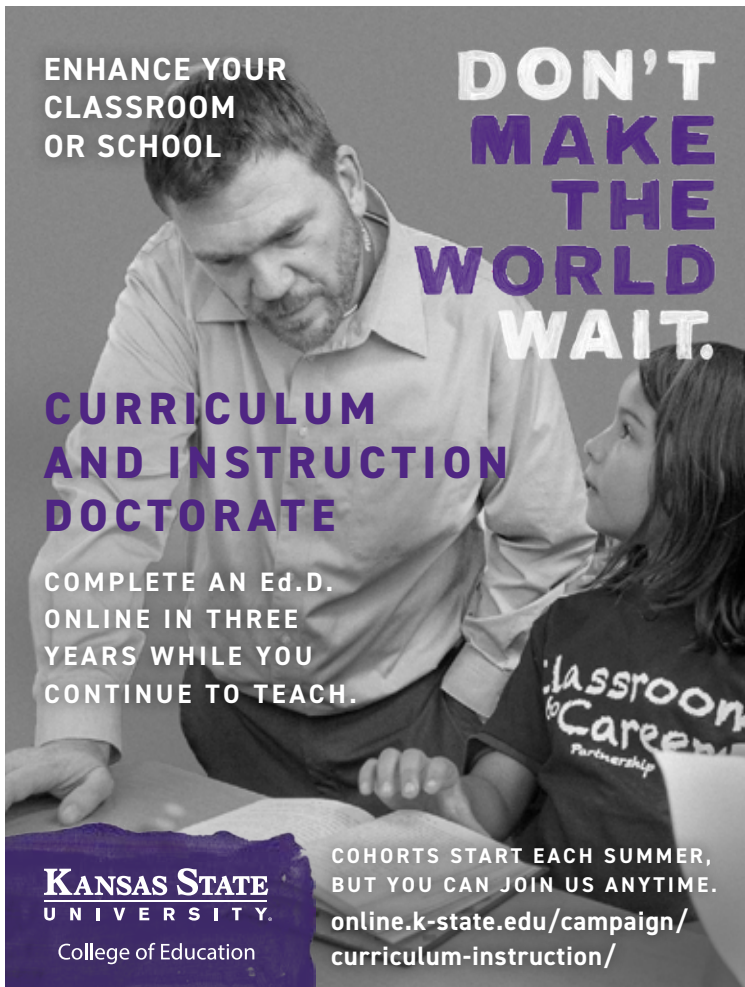
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ON THE COVER: Dr. Michael Schumacher, incoming superintendent, laughs with fourth grader Nataly Guzman Ochoa.

## #OneShawneeMission



Help us share great news from our district on social media at @thesmsd.

### INSIDE

Shawnee Mission School District  
8200 W. 71st Street  
Shawnee Mission, KS 66204

Inside Shawnee Mission School District is published by the Communications Team in the Shawnee Mission School District.

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109<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL  
**Kansas PTA Convention**  
Saturday, April 13, 2024  
Overland Park, KS



# GET GROWING

WITH KANSAS PTA

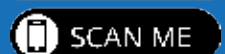
## Now, let's register for Convention!

**Kansas PTA Convention registration is done online. Scan the QR code below or visit [kspta2024.company.site](https://kspta2024.company.site)**

You may register delegates without identifying the delegate by name to take advantage of the Early Bird registration pricing. Names must be submitted to the Kansas PTA office by **April 5th, 2024**.

The Kansas PTA convention is open to all members of the Kansas PTA. If you are not a PTA member, memberships to the Kansas PTA Golden Oaks Unit PTA is \$7.00 and can be added to your online convention registration or purchased online at [goldenoakspta.memberhub.com/store](https://goldenoakspta.memberhub.com/store).

## Call To Convention, Information and Registration



# The Hub

*Updates from Superintendent Dr. Michelle Hubbard*

When I announced my retirement, I shared how I planned to make each day count, up until the very last day.

Over my last nine years in Shawnee Mission, I've noticed how we often talk in numbers to describe our large district: Our 14 cities, more than 26,500 students, more than 3,600 team members and more than 100,000 households. I've engaged in hundreds of meetings analyzing data to plan budgets and personalize learning based on what assessments tell us. I've visited all 48 of our school buildings many times and had the joy of seeing thousands of our graduates receive their diplomas.

What will not be a surprise is that the number that will stick with me most about the Shawnee Mission School District community is the number ONE.

What I've loved about Shawnee Mission is seeing the way our community makes every day count by acting as ONE Shawnee Mission to help each student achieve their personal best. The commitment to unity and focus on supporting all students will continue as Dr. Michael Schumacher becomes Superintendent on July 1. (You can learn more about him on page 6 of Inside). I am confident this spring will be a time to shine. We'll continue to make every day count as we celebrate all we've learned and begin to take our next steps.

Thank you to every student, every staff member, and every community member who makes us ONE amazing district. Shine on Shawnee Mission!

We continue to have numerous student and staff achievements to celebrate as a community:

## Horizon Award

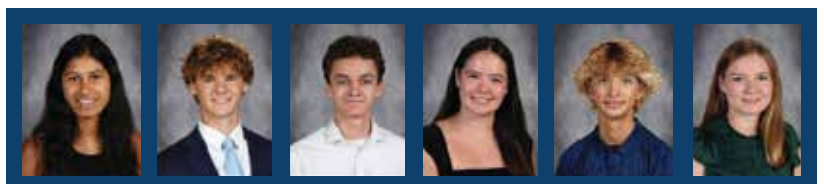
The Kansas State Department of Education honored Brennan Mills, an English Language Arts teacher at Indian Woods Middle School, and Liz Palmer, a second-grade teacher at Rosehill Elementary as Kansas Horizon Award winners. This recognition is given to honor outstanding first-year teachers who are paving the way for a new generation of educators.



*Dr. Michelle Hubbard*

## Presidential Scholars

This spring, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program named six Shawnee Mission seniors as candidates. Each year, up to 161 students are named Presidential Scholars, one of the nation's highest honors for high school students. Shawnee Mission's candidates are: Shawnee Mission East: Aanya Bansal, Mitchell Blair, Kael Mercer, and Katherine Murphy; Shawnee Mission Northwest: Theodore Ohly; and Shawnee Mission South: Emma Krueger.



## Spring Celebrations

Spring is always such an exciting time in Shawnee Mission as we celebrate all we have accomplished during the school year.

I invite the entire community to join me in honoring all educators and staff who serve Shawnee Mission during Educator Appreciation Week from Monday, May 6, to Friday, May 10, 2024. Watch [www.smsd.org](http://www.smsd.org) for more information.

Commencement for the Class of 2024 is scheduled as follows:

- May 20: SM East at Shawnee Mission North; SM South at Shawnee Mission South
- May 21: SM North at Shawnee Mission North; SM West at Shawnee Mission South
- May 22: Horizons at Shawnee Mission South; Shawnee Mission Northwest at Shawnee Mission North.

Please join me in congratulating Shawnee Mission seniors, thanking our educators, and honoring all of our students who are celebrating all they have accomplished in 2023-2024! It is A Time to Shine!

## Women in Leadership

Shawnee Mission students and more than 80 mentors from around Kansas City gathered at the first women's professional sports stadium in the world, to learn about and celebrate Women in Leadership. Female students from all five Shawnee Mission high schools joined mentors at Canadian Pacific Stadium, home of the Kansas City Current soccer team. Shawnee Mission West has presented this popular breakfast event to students for three years, bringing more than 150 women together for a chance to connect and learn about serving in leadership roles. This year, the Women in Leadership program expanded to five of Shawnee Mission's high schools.



## Shawnee Mission Mic'd Up

Learn more about what is going on in the Shawnee Mission School District by listening to the Shawnee Mission Mic'd Up podcast. In recent weeks, episodes have featured incoming Superintendent Dr. Michael Schumacher, information about the strategic planning process, and the amazing school spirit found at Shawnee Mission athletic events. Stay up-to-date on episodes by visiting [smsd.org/information-central/micd-up](http://smsd.org/information-central/micd-up).



## Read Across SMSD



Each month we continue to encourage reading for all ages and celebrate books in support of our district belief that the community's strength is derived from its diversity. Recent episodes have featured: High School students from the Youth Equity Stewardship (YES!) program demonstrating how to lead with love, artists from Apache Elementary celebrating diversity through self-portraits, and PTA Citizenship Writing Program honorees helping us discover the power of poetry. We invite everyone in our community to Read Across SMSD. Visit [smsd.org/about/read-across-smsd](http://smsd.org/about/read-across-smsd) to connect to more resources. Post your participation with #ReadAcrossSMSD! ◆

# Meet Dr. Schumacher

*Incoming SMSD Superintendent*



Dr. Schumacher and art teacher Hayleigh Chudik lead students in an art project.

is imperative that we ensure a sense of belonging and foster that commitment through our actions and policies. We recognize that every person brings a unique set of strengths, experiences and challenges and it's our responsibility to ensure that all students have access to what they need to succeed. By embracing diversity in all its forms and fostering a culture of belonging and respect, we will continue to create an environment where every student feels valued, empowered and inspired to reach their full potential.

My own personal journey shows how incredible Shawnee Mission is. I began my career teaching science and coaching athletics in 1998. From

**A**s the newly appointed Superintendent of the Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD), I am honored and excited to embark on this journey of educational leadership and community collaboration. When the Board of Education approved my appointment in February, I thanked them for this incredible honor and responsibility. I recognize the importance of the role of superintendent in the SMSD and the trust they have shown in me, and I do not take it lightly.

I believe deeply that public education is the great equalizer in this country and SMSD is a shining example of the unlimited possibilities that exist when great people work together to serve the needs of students. With a steadfast commitment to excellence, equity, and innovation, I am eager to work alongside dedicated educators, supportive parents, and engaged students to ensure that every learner thrives in our diverse and dynamic learning community. To the employees, families, community members and most importantly the students of the Shawnee Mission School District, please know that I am here to serve you.

At the heart of our mission lies a deep dedication to providing a world class education which prepares our students for success in an ever-evolving global society. As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, it is imperative that we equip our students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world. This means fostering a culture of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication, while also instilling in our students a sense of empathy, resilience, and adaptability.

Central to our vision is a commitment to belonging: Every student, every employee and every stakeholder holds an instrumental place in our learning community. Therefore, it

the outside looking in, I always admired the work that the SMSD was doing and desired to somehow become a part of this community. I shared with the Board that when I was completing my doctorate back in 2010, I asked my supervisor at the University of Kansas to provide me with a field experience in a large public school setting. That experience was in Shawnee Mission with Dr. Gene Johnson, who was superintendent at the time. To me, the SMSD was IT! It was the biggest dream that I could have, working in a district like this.

I never dreamed that I would be given the honor to serve as this district's superintendent. I promise the SMSD community that I will not let you down and I will work tirelessly every day to meet our strategic goals and serve our community. I will work and fight for what our students need to succeed in the classroom, and to ensure that our community has the finest public school system in the state, the region, and the country.

I am deeply honored to serve as the superintendent of the Shawnee Mission School District. Together, we have an incredible opportunity to shape the future of education and make a positive difference in the lives of students and the community. With passion, perseverance, and a shared commitment to excellence, I am confident that we can achieve our Strategic Plan goals and ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed, thrive, and pursue their dreams. Thank you for entrusting me with this important responsibility, and I look forward to working together to build a brighter future for all. -Dr. Michael Schumacher

# A Road Map to the Future

## Strategic Plan Cycle II Update



Work is underway to update the Shawnee Mission School District's Strategic Plan. The updated plan builds on the current plan and will serve and guide the district from 2024-2029.

"The Strategic Plan serves as a road map, building on the achievements of the past and guiding us toward future success," expressed Superintendent Dr. Michelle Hubbard.

### A Plan Driven by the Community

In January, students, families, staff, and community members were invited to participate in a ThoughtExchange

survey. The survey asked participants to offer insight concerning the skills future graduates will need to be successful in higher education and in their future careers.

As a next step, a detailed briefing book containing district data, facts, statistics, and insights from the ThoughtExchange, was presented to a 31-member Steering Committee. The committee is composed of a broad range of individuals from across the Shawnee Mission School District community.

For two days in late in late February, the Steering Committee met to review and affirm the mission statement, beliefs, strategies, objectives, and parameters

for the district strategic planning process. The committee also developed strategies to guide the work for this second cycle of the Strategic Plan.

Remy Witt, a Shawnee Mission South junior and Steering Committee member, was impressed with the overall process.

"I just think it's great to see from all these different community members how much they care about our district," expressed Witt.

### The Planning Continues

In March, Action Teams were formed. These teams are responsible for the creation of action plans for each of the strategies developed by the Steering Committee.

A presentation from the Action Teams will be made to the Steering Committee on June 6, 2024. A finalized draft of the updated Strategic Plan will be presented to the Shawnee Mission Board of Education on June 24, 2024.

To learn more about the strategic planning process listen to episode 15 of Shawnee Mission Mic'd Up. Find the podcast by visiting [www.smsd.org/information-central/micd-up](http://www.smsd.org/information-central/micd-up). ◆



# SMSD STRONG

Strong Schools, Strong Community

Strategy 5 of the district's 2019-2024 Strategic Plan states "We will strategically focus resources to support state-of-the-art facilities to accomplish our beliefs, missions, and objectives." Significant progress has been made toward achieving this strategy, thanks to the approval of a \$264 million bond referendum by voters in 2021.

Recent updates include the start of construction on the site of Tomahawk Elementary School, the last of five planned elementary school rebuilds.

Looking ahead, major construction projects in 2024 will take place at Indian Hills Middle School and Shawnee Mission West High School.

Indian Hills will gain an addition which will include a large classroom space, smaller collaborative spaces, and several small offices.

SM West is set to undergo an expansion with a second-story addition on the north side of the building.

For updates, visit [www.smsd.org/bond-2021/construction-info](http://www.smsd.org/bond-2021/construction-info). ◆





Pre-school teacher Amber Pagan engages with students at Nieman Elementary.

# Enrolling Now for Pre-K and Kindergarten

**S**hawnee Mission School District (SMSD) is now enrolling Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students for the 2024-2025 school year!

## Pre-Kindergarten

Provide a strong start to your child's educational journey with Shawnee Mission School District's Pre-Kindergarten program.

The Pre-Kindergarten program is educationally and developmentally appropriate for students and emphasizes their need for active learning. Dedicated educators provide an environment full of challenging materials and interactive activities, all geared towards fostering the growth and development of each child.

"In our classrooms, we're always active, moving a lot, and have hands-on activities," shared Pre-K teacher Tina Huntsinger. "We want to make sure we cater to all the styles of learning."

Children who reside within the district and will be 4-years old on or before August 31, 2024, but are not yet kindergarten-eligible are able to enroll.

Pre-K is a half-day program in Shawnee Mission. Fee and no-fee options will be offered in the 2024-2025 school

year. Sessions are held from 8:10 a.m.-10:55 a.m. and 12:25-3:10 p.m.

For more information about Pre-Kindergarten, please visit [www.smsd.org/academics/early-childhood/pre-kindergarten](http://www.smsd.org/academics/early-childhood/pre-kindergarten).

## Kindergarten

The Shawnee Mission School District offers free, full-day kindergarten at each of the district's 34 elementary schools.

Through personalized learning, the kindergarten program is designed to help students discover and explore the world around them.

"Kindergarten is the foundation of all future learning," explained Kindergarten teacher Georgia Klos. "It's all programmed to meet the state curricular standards and to prepare

students for future success in school and in life."

This spring, Kindergarten Kickoff events will be held in every SMSD elementary school. At these events, families and incoming kindergarteners have the opportunity to visit schools and meet school staff.

By state law, a child must be five years old on or before Aug. 31, 2024 to enroll in Kindergarten.

For more information about Kindergarten, including dates for Kindergarten Kickoff, please visit, [www.smsd.org/academics/kindergarten](http://www.smsd.org/academics/kindergarten).

Our school communities are excited to welcome incoming Pre-K and Kindergarten students. We look forward to working with families to help each child meet their full potential. 🍎

## How to Enroll

If you are a new family to the SMSD, visit [www.smsd.org/families/enrollment](http://www.smsd.org/families/enrollment) to access online enrollment. If you have children enrolled and attending Shawnee Mission Schools, log into your Skyward Family Access account and select New Student Enrollment to enroll your incoming Pre-K or Kindergarten student.





# Summer is a Time for Learning in SMSD



## Summer Enrichment

Join us this summer for an enriching adventure!

Summer Enrichment classes feature art, music, technology, science, culinary arts, sports, theater, and more. There's something for everyone to explore and enjoy.

Mark your calendars for June 10-July 19, 2024. Classes run Monday through Friday, with morning sessions from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and afternoon sessions from 1p.m. to 4 p.m.

Early Care and Lunch Care options available. There will be no classes on June 19 and the week of July 4.

## Summer Band Blast

Students can stay in their best playing shape this summer with Summer Band Blast. The program is a one-week camp experience for current SMSD 5th-8th grade band students. It's a mix of band rehearsals, small ensembles, and sectionals which give players an opportunity to improve their skills.

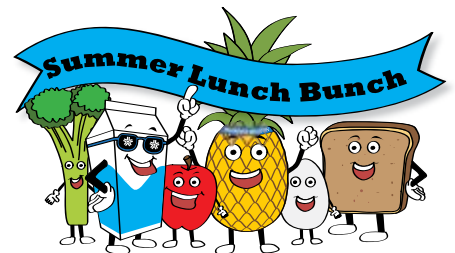
Classes will be held June 3-7 for 5th-6th graders and June 10-14 for 7th-8th graders.

Ready to secure your spot in a summer program? Scan the QR code for more information or visit [smsd.org/academics/summer-programs](https://www.smsd.org/academics/summer-programs).



## Summer Lunch Bunch

This summer, children ages 1-18 can enjoy free meals while adults can purchase a lunch for \$5.00 (cash only). Children do not have to be students in the district to enjoy lunch. All are welcome.



- **Dates:** June 3, 2024 - July 26, 2024

(closed June 19, July 4, and July 5)

- **Time:** 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

- **Locations:**

Comanche Elementary School, 8200 Grant Ave.

Rosehill Elementary School, 9801 Rosehill Rd.

Shawnee Mission North High School, 7401 Johnson Dr.

Shawano Elementary School, 11230 W. 75th St.

Westridge Middle School, 9300 Nieman Rd.

Summer Lunch Bunch will be dine-in only. Grab and go will not be available.

Check out menus and more at: [www.smsd.org/about/departments/food-service/summer-lunch-bunch](https://www.smsd.org/about/departments/food-service/summer-lunch-bunch). ●



## \$3 BILLION

Amount of scholarship dollars offered to Shawnee Mission juniors and seniors through the Scholarship Shawnee Mission program offered by the Shawnee Mission Education Foundation in 2023.

## NATIONALLY RANKED

SM East, SM North, SM Northwest, SM South, and SM West are all ranked on the US News and World Report list of Best High Schools in the United States. Shawnee Mission East was ranked #2 in the state of Kansas.



## BEST AMONG THE BEST

Roesland Elementary was named a 2023 National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education based on academic progress and progress in closing achievement gaps among student groups on assessments.

In 2023, Dr. Todd Dain, SM South principal, was named Kansas Principal of the Year by the Kansas Principals Association.



In 2023, Dr. Michelle Hubbard, Superintendent, was named Kansas State Superintendent of the year by the Kansas Superintendent Association.

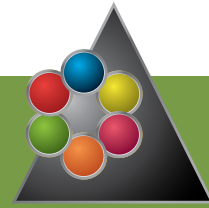
## SEAL OF BILITERACY

142 students earned the Seal of Biliteracy in 2023, an honor presented to students who have earned proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. 100 languages are spoken within Shawnee Mission schools.



## JOURNALISM HONORS

The National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA) consistently honors Shawnee Mission journalists for excellence in student publications. The NSPA recognized Shawnee Mission Northwest, Shawnee Mission North, and Shawnee Mission East High Schools on its "Pacemaker 100" list, honoring the top 100 student-run publications of the past 100 years.



# You're Invited

2024 Shawnee Mission School District Research and Development Forum



## Student Showcase

All community members are welcome to attend the Research and Development Forum (R&D Forum) Student Showcase, featuring student projects in the areas of art, science, and career and technical education that they have created throughout the year.

Open Houses will be held at the Center for Academic Achievement (CAA), 8200 W. 71st St., Overland Park, Kansas.

- 4 to 7 p.m. on April 23, 2024
- 4 to 7 p.m. on April 24, 2024
- 4 to 7 p.m. on April 25, 2024

Entries will be on display at the CAA, with a reception for entrants and families. There will also be music performances by student groups from across the district.

## Next Great Idea Live Pitch Competition

Student innovators will present their ideas to judges for a chance to win cash prizes and turn their ideas into reality.

The contest will be livestreamed so the community can watch and support. Visit [www.smsd.org](http://www.smsd.org) for the link to watch the event.

Watch the Next Great Idea from 9 to 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, April 27, 2024. An award ceremony will be held and live streamed at 2 p.m.

## About the R&D Forum

The Shawnee Mission Research and Development Forum celebrates its 62nd year in 2024. It is one of the SMSD's biggest project showcases of the year. Sincere appreciation is extended to the Regnier Family for 62 years of generous support for the SMSD R&D Forum. ♦



# Special Education - An Important Part of Making Us ONE Shawnee Mission



Danny Robeson, Tomahawk Elementary sixth grader, works on a lesson with Paraeducator Jordan Bright.

**D**ashel Forsyth and Danny Robeson, sixth graders at Tomahawk Elementary, have been in the same class since Kindergarten and became friends over the years.

“Danny is pretty silly. I like high-fiving him a lot,” Dashel said. “I think he is my first friend who has a disability. I just talked with him a little bit and we were just friends!”

Since Danny started school, he has shown classmates like Dashel how people can “look different, communicate differently, and learn differently,” Danny’s mother, Laura Robeson said. Danny has several disabilities. He has cerebral palsy, and is non-speaking.

“Danny needs total support in regard to both his physical care and communication,” Robeson explains.

Danny is supported by paraeducator Jordan Bright, support staff members, and educators; it takes a team to ensure Danny is participating at school, just like any child, in his own way.

## **We are ONE Shawnee Mission**

Students who receive Special Education services like Danny are a part of what makes the school district ONE

Shawnee Mission. Across the district, 12 percent of students receive special education services. They range from pre-kindergarten special education to post-high school transition services for students ages 18-21. It includes gifted education and hundreds of students integrated into classrooms.

Shawnee Mission provides these services in support of the district’s objective that every student achieves their personal best. As educators, families, and students work on this goal, they do so at a time when these services are not fully funded. In Kansas, special education has not been fully funded for a decade.

## **A Districtwide Legislative Priority**

To make sure all special education services are funded by law, the district reduces other services to pay for special education. Urging the state to “support special education services and state funding at the required 92 percent of excess costs and mitigate the wide variance of reimbursements” continues to be a priority on the SMSD’s legislative platform.

“It’s important to understand that these unreimbursed

special education costs impact ALL students, as students with an Individual Education Program (IEP) are general education students first and spend most of their time in the general education classroom,” Sherry Dumolien, chief of special education, testified to the Task Force on Special Education in January 2024.

Ultimately, this means fewer opportunities for all.

“We already have students eligible for special education actively participating in opportunities like debate, cross country, or unified sports. They are able to access these opportunities, which is phenomenal, but, with more, it would create more access for our special education students as well,” Dumolien added.

That is also why parents like Robeson and Sara Jahnke advocate.

Jahnke’s son Crosby Orlando is a second grader at Tomahawk. Crosby, who has Down syndrome, has attended Shawnee Mission since before Kindergarten. As discussion continues, Jahnke has heard some refer to the end of a legislative session as just another lost year.

“That’s unacceptable,” she said “We can’t have a lost year with these students. This is their one shot at growing up!”

## The Difference Each School Year Makes

Those who serve in Special Education see the significant impact time has on students.

“There is a profound impact that dedicated teachers can have on shaping the future of their students by meeting them exactly where they are,” Megan Hergenrader, special education resource teacher at East Antioch Elementary explained.

Though her job requires constant need for adaptability and patience, she finds there are many shining moments of students developing confidence and meaningful connections.

“These highlights serve as reminders of the resilience and potential within each and every child,” she explained.

As a gifted facilitator, Courtney Moffitt describes seeing “a-ha” moments every day with the fifth and sixth graders she works with at Pawnee Elementary School. Students receiving Students Exploring and Extending Knowledge (SEEK) services are often working on projects designed to help them hone critical thinking skills, solve big problems, build self confidence,

and strengthen social-emotional skills. Moffitt describes the philosophy of the program being rooted in helping problem-solvers to take risks and think out of the box.

“The current programming holds true to that philosophy and brings out the best in our students,” Moffitt shared.

In Pre-K through high school buildings across the district, Corran Huber serves as a physical therapist. She helps train staff to transfer students safely, provides equipment to help students move independently at school, and works with students to improve their mobility. Interacting with students is the highlight of the job, and the gains they make is just “icing on the cake,” she described.

“For some of my students, you see results quickly, like learning a new skill or navigating stairs safely,” Huber shared. “For some, their growth may be seen more in their improved tolerance to being in a certain body position longer, or tolerating stretching for longer periods or showing more comfort in the world they are in by being able to work with new staff members with less anxiety...I help them to be as independent and successful as they can be.”

Many children in Shawnee Mission make great strides in their very first classroom experience at the early childhood level, Meredith Bush, early childhood special education teacher explained.

“The services we provide are crucial in their development of language, social-emotional skills, pre-academics, and physical growth,” Bush explained

Both Danny and Crosby began their educational experiences in early childhood special education, prior to Kindergarten.



Crosby Orlando, Tomahawk Elementary second grader, practices skills with Paraeducator Julie Moore.

“There are so many things that have made Danny’s time in school successful,” Robeson said. “I think probably the most important thing is that everyone always believed in Danny and put Danny first.”

### Helping Each Other Shine

That belief in Danny has resulted in numerous strides. When Danny and his peers went to Wildwood Outdoor Education Center in the last year, his team worked to make sure he could join in archery, canoeing, and fishing. Over the years, they also developed a new way for Danny to answer multiple choice questions, which was a major breakthrough.

“It was a game changer,” Laura Robeson shared.

Crosby’s parents also recognize his progress in school. He’s working on communication skills and showing signs of expressing his sense of humor. He’s navigating lunchroom routines, a culmination of hours of therapy and special education support. Sara Jahnke said her heart was warmed seeing how at a school parade, students waved and said “Hi Crosby” as he walked by. His friends held his hand and walked him through the parade.

“It made me realize that we are not all alone in making sure Crosby is successful and happy in life,” Jahnke added.

These kinds of accomplishments can be seen in a variety of general education settings with support of special education

as well as within the special education settings across the SMSD, Dumolien illustrated.

“We have the opportunity to support students through many different milestones,” she added. “Anything from first words and gestures to prestigious awards. Each student’s accomplishment is going to be special to the individual student and family journey they are experiencing.”

Danny, Crosby, and all students receiving special education services are a part of what strengthens the entire Tomahawk Elementary School community, Principal Erin Aldrich shared.

“When we talk about our core values as a district, it states that diversity is our strength,” Aldrich said. “There are so many ways in which we’re diverse—in the way we learn, in the way we look, our backgrounds and our experiences. When we find ways to include one aspect of difference, we become better at including all the differences that are found in the community. It strengthens who we are as an organization and creates a sense of belonging.”

This spring, Dasher and Danny are getting ready for middle school. Dasher has enjoyed getting to know Danny and other students at Tomahawk who receive special education services so much he is considering becoming a paraeducator. That, or maybe a scientist.

In the near future, Dasher says he’s looking forward to going to middle school with Danny. ♦

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Left: Nadia Chin, Christa McAuliffe Elementary first grader, demonstrates using a "Reframe Your Brain" station. Right: A Pre-K student and Speech Language Pathologist Lisa Bergeson use a communication board at SMECEC.

# Empowering Innovative Education Through Excellence in Education (E2) Grants

Shawnee Mission Education Foundation's Excellence in Education (E2) grants enhance classrooms across the Shawnee Mission School District by funding projects aimed at fostering innovative and challenging teaching and learning.

From funding Apple Pencil devices for middle school art departments to purchasing books for our youngest learners at the Shawnee Mission Early Childhood Education Center (SMECEC), E2 grants fund projects that enhance the curriculum.

The Foundation is funding \$35,000 worth of E2 grants in both the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years.

"The idea behind E2 grants is to provide funds that go beyond the budget, so our educators can think outside the box and engage students in creative and challenging ways," explained Kim Hinkle, executive director of the Shawnee Mission Education Foundation. "Every year we're so impressed with the quality and ingenuity of the grant proposals."

Among successful grant recipients in recent years are the "Reframe Your Brain" stations at Christa McAuliffe Elementary and the Communication Board project at the SMECEC.

## Reframing the Brain at Christa McAuliffe

"Reframe Your Brain" stations guide students through nine physical and mental tasks that help students self-calm and refocus when they are experiencing stress or other big emotions, explained Caren Howes, social worker at Christa McAuliffe Elementary.

At the start of each year, students are given a grade-appropriate lesson about how their brains work. They learn about the limbic system, which is responsible for strong emotions, and how it can sometimes overwhelm the more rational "thinking" part of the brain. Students are taught how to use

the stations to refocus themselves so they can rejoin their classrooms ready to learn.

"Applying for the E2 grant was a way for us to bring these active calming stations into our building and help lots of students have access to these tools," shared Howes. "Everything goes back to how we can help students learn."

## Communication Boards at Shawnee Mission Early Childhood Center

Communication Boards have been installed in the gym, on the playground, and in classrooms throughout SMECEC. The boards allow non-verbal as well as verbal students to express themselves, explained Lisa Bergeson, speech language pathologist.

Developed in collaboration with speech language pathologists and the assistive technology department, the Communication Boards are composed of core words and offer visual symbols that augment speech. Using the visual communication system has been powerful for students and staff, shared Bergeson.

"It's a research-based tool that allows all our students an opportunity to be able to express their wants, needs, ideas, and feelings," she explained. "Even if a child is not ready to be verbal, we can point to the pictures and help plant the seed through repetition and exposure."

Bergeson expressed her gratitude to the Foundation for their work to support teaching and learning through E2 grants.

"It's been a blessing to have the communication boards on our playground, especially with the diversity of students we have," expressed Bergeson.

The success stories of projects funded by E2 grants underscore the positive impact of these initiatives on student learning and development. ♦

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