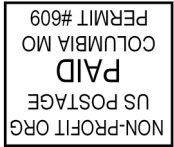


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## ECRWSS POSTAL CUSTOMER

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## QUARTERLY CONNECTION



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## Boone County Nature School opening

On August 23, the Missouri Department of Conservation and Columbia Public Schools came together to host the grand opening of the Boone County Nature School, a project more than a decade in the making.



The ceremony featured remarks from Board of Education President Suzette Waters, Missouri Department of Conservation Director Jason Summers, and former Missouri Conservation Director Sara Parker Pauley, in addition to others connected to the project. The event featured a ribbon-cutting, followed by guided tours, and attendees enjoyed exploring a variety of conservation education tables and other activities.

The Nature School building is 8,230 square-feet and comprises four nature-themed classrooms, each representing Missouri's ecosystems – forest, aquatic, prairie, and caves. There is also lab space and room for exhibits which offers "place-based" education and public conservation-related programming for all students throughout Boone County.

The Nature School building is located on 111 acres of conservation land adjacent to Three Creeks Conservation Area and was donated in 2019 by Vicki Russell and the late Hank Waters. Both enjoyed long careers in media and publishing in the Columbia area and care deeply about sharing nature with others. The family planted more than 40,000 trees on the land and wished to preserve the place, which had been their home since 1981.

"This building is a culmination of an idea that started more than a decade ago," Waters said. "The idea was to share the wonders of nature with children across Boone County. This will be a place where thousands of Boone County's Children will have the chance to experience, investigate, and fall in love with nature."

MDC Regional Director Brian Flowers explains that MDC owns the property and has a 40-year lease agreement with Columbia Public Schools to operate the Nature School on that property. MDC is committed to maintaining the area and will also grant CPS access to the rest of the conservation area, which includes the education pavilion, the facilities, miles of hiking trails, and more.



Funding for the project came in part from MDC, Columbia Public Schools and the community, which Flowers said is a testament to the community's understanding of the benefits a school of this type can lend.

"You don't have to look too far to see how, as a society, we are getting farther and farther away from nature," Flowers said. "But when we talk to people, they say they enjoy it. The benefits to being outdoors are many. By showing students that they have a place in nature, we can make them comfortable outdoors, teach them about how people and wildlife interact, and hopefully they will take away a desire to be stewards and conservationists, so that these future generations will be equipped to care and protect our natural resources."

All Columbia Public Schools fifth graders will spend seven days at the Nature School, participating in various experiential, hands-on learning throughout the academic year. Learning will be spaced over three sessions to allow students to observe the native landscape during the fall, winter, and spring. This structure also helps to mitigate inclement weather cancellations, as students who miss one visit due to weather will still have other opportunities. *(Continued on next page.)*





# Boone County Nature School opening continued

During their visits, students will have a plethora of place-based learning experiences. Place-based learning fosters learning about a local community, or a “place,” by studying what is unique to that place, including its culture, history, art, economy, and nature. This type of education focuses on moving education outside the classroom and into the community and environment.

“Being one of those last generations to really have nature as our playground — that is what this place is about,” Summers said.

Students who visit the Nature School will explore Missouri’s ecosystems, connect with state history at the Boone County History and Culture Center and work on sustainability projects.

Other Nature School studies include collecting real-world data on monarch migration and studying weather stations to learn to make weather predictions. Students can walk along a variety of hiking trails that are lined with forest and prairie, and they will study different species of trees and the birds that fly by.

A pond on the property will allow students to fish and will foster learning about frogs, salamanders, and other pond creatures. Students will learn about navigation through map and compass techniques. Additionally, wildlife cameras on the property will allow students to see what animals do when people are not around.

“CPS schools all have a common curriculum, but the Nature School allows every kid in Columbia to have a shared experience, with real-world application of what they are studying in science,” CPS Elementary Science Coordinator Ragan Webb said.

Besides hosting fifth graders, the Nature School will also welcome middle school students for science camps and high schoolers for field trips, as the school’s property offers students the opportunity to learn outdoor skills including kayaking, archery, and orienteering.

Webb said what students take away from their time at the Nature School will be different for each of them, and that she is just excited to see them excited.

“We had one group go through in August and it was really hot, but kids weren’t really complaining about the heat,” Webb said. “They were engaged and curious and being kids and learning. Many caught their first fish ever or went to the woods for their first time. I’m excited to see this play out — all that hard work — materialize through the kids. That’s what’s kept us going.”

An additional feature of the property includes an astronomy dome donated by a local astronomy club. There is also discussion of adding a garden and an orchard in the future. Although the property is a school resource and not open to the public during school hours, Flowers said there will be events and activities open to the community during non-school hours.

Missouri Department of Conservation Educator Jenna Striek has her office at the Nature School building, where she acts as a liaison and promotes conservation curriculum for all schools. Stiek provides education to teachers and helps to structure and schedule programming, supports CPS in the lessons being taught, and works to organize any public programs.

Those interested in public access to the space are encouraged to follow the Nature School Facebook page at [facebook.com/boonecountynatureschool](https://facebook.com/boonecountynatureschool) to stay up to date on community events. For more information about the school and to see photos and videos of the space in use, visit [boonecountynatureschool.com](https://boonecountynatureschool.com).



Outdoor learning immerses students in nature.

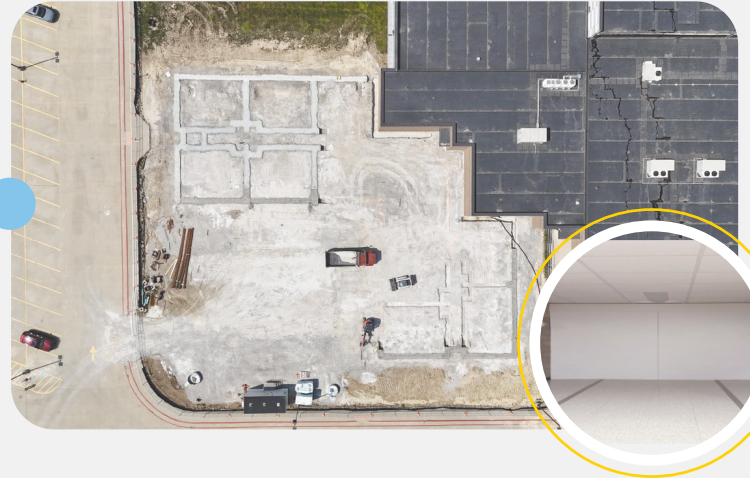


Students learn about different bird species native to the area.

## CONSTRUCTION PROJECT UPDATES

### BATTLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADDITION

The playground is completed and was ready for student use on the first day of the new school year. The hallway has temporary walls to block off the construction area, along with temporary signage. The storm shelter and classroom footings are completed, and concrete floors for the storm shelter wing and the classroom wing are poured. The completed project, slated for August of 2025, will provide additional classrooms, a new storm shelter, and bring student capacity up to approximately 650 students.



### NEW SOUTHWEST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The water line installation and the road around the footprint of the building are completed. Concrete footings continue to be excavated and poured, including those for the gym and kitchen. Plumbing and electrical work below the slab has begun. Seed and straw were placed along the new lane on Sinclair Road. September work focused on installing curbs and gutters at the west parking lot area and laying asphalt, blocking up walls in the kitchen area, pouring the concrete slab for the kitchen, waterproofing the elevator pit and putting up walls for the elevator shaft.



### COLUMBIA AREA CAREER CENTER

Work on the construction shop and the auto shop is now completed. Demolition of the existing walls of the welding shop and mezzanine has begun. Phase one of the courtyard is done, as well as utility work underground beneath the horticulture area. Excavation of the building foundation and pouring of exterior footings are complete. Crews are working on completing the building and column footings, as well as plumbing work, and finishing restroom partitioning in the west wing.



For regular updates of all CPS construction projects, visit [buildingcps.com](https://buildingcps.com).



# 2024 Hall of leaders



The Columbia Public Schools Foundation (CPSF) honored its 2024 Hall of Leaders at an event that took place on September 25 at the State Historical Society of Missouri. Honorees include Outstanding Alumnus Taylor Trogdon and Outstanding Retired Educators Chris Belcher, Mary Humlicek, and Sue Young.

“The Columbia Public Schools Foundation is pleased to honor this year’s Hall of Leaders,” David Townsend, president of the CPSF Board of Directors, said. “We celebrate those who have made outstanding contributions, whether as alumni or educators.”

## **Outstanding Alumnus, Taylor Trogdon**

Taylor Trogdon attended Shepard Boulevard Elementary School, Lange Middle School, Oakland Junior High School, and Hickman High School. He received a bachelor’s degree in meteorology and atmospheric sciences from the University of Missouri and a master’s degree in atmospheric sciences from Creighton University. Taylor is a meteorologist and software engineer with more than 15 years of operational forecasting experience. He is currently the acting associate director of the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Global Systems Laboratory in Boulder, Colorado.

## **Outstanding Retired Educator, Chris Belcher**

Chris Belcher served as superintendent of Columbia Public Schools from 2009 to 2014. During his tenure, he established a 10-year long-range facilities plan. He began the design and planning for a third high school, including redrawing district boundaries, and realigned the secondary school configuration to combine middle and junior high schools. He also implemented the Achievement via Individual Determination (AVID) program, still in use today, to help close the achievement gap for students. Belcher received his bachelor’s in biology and chemistry, a master’s in educational administration, and an education specialist degree in educational administration, all from Central Missouri State University, and a doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Missouri.

## **Outstanding Retired Educator, Mary Humlicek**

Mary Humlicek retired after a 30-year career with Columbia Public Schools, serving 25 years as the district’s Title 1 coordinator. As Title 1 coordinator, she was responsible for overseeing the federal program, which included coordinating and evaluating projects including preschool, reading recovery, reading intervention and extended time

summer programs. She developed the early childhood program and oversaw all aspects of the program as it grew from serving 30 children to more than 600 during her tenure. She has a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a master’s in education-reading from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, and also completed graduate course work at the University of Missouri-Columbia and Lindenwood University.

## **Outstanding Retired Educator, Sue Young**

Sue Young retired in 2005 after a 17-year career teaching at Rock Bridge Elementary School. She primarily taught fourth grade, with one year at third grade and two years as a Fellows Program mentor. In addition to engaging her students, she served on district committees and led fellow teachers in RBE Teachers as Readers. This teacher-organized group met year-round to read professional literature to enhance teaching and develop student-centered programs. Young received a bachelor’s degree in education from the University of Tulsa as well as a master’s and doctorate in curriculum and instruction from the University of Missouri.

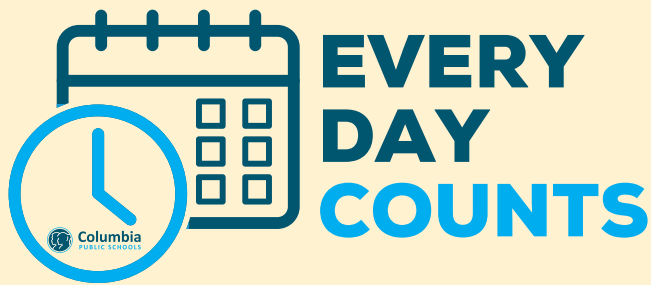
Founded in 1996 by community volunteers, the Columbia Public Schools Foundation (CPSF) enriches public education through community giving. CPSF has funded projects in every school, allocating over \$1.6 million. For more than 28 years, CPSF has supported teachers and students.



## Pear Deck Tutor

**Pear Deck Tutor (formerly Tutor Me)** is a free resource for all CPS students at all grade levels. Available online 24/7, it connects students with highly qualified tutors for learning support, whenever and wherever they need it the most. Students can upload their assignment or the problem they are trying to solve and get live one-on-one tutoring from a content expert. CPS students can access Pear Deck through the CPS Student Portal.





The updated **2024-2025** school year calendar is available at [www.cpsk12.org/calendar](http://www.cpsk12.org/calendar).

**90%** of students / **90%** of the time

#### Here are a few facts about attendance:



- Missed school days can significantly impact a child's learning and overall health.
- Students who attend school regularly perform better on exams and assessments.
- Missing two days a month—excused or unexcused—can add up to a child being considered chronically absent.
- Students who miss 9 or more days of school each year may not be on track to graduate.
- If a student has a doctor or dentist appointment during the day, parents are asked to have their children attend the rest of the day. This reinforces the importance of going to school and attending classes.
- Schools lose revenue when students don't attend.



## COLUMBIA SCHOLAR CLINIC

*Only open to Columbia Public Schools Students*

The Columbia SCHOLAR Clinic offers a spectrum of health services, including primary care, physicals, and dental care. In addition, the clinic has recently added optometry services.

**Hours: 8 am - 5 pm - Mon-Fri**

1010 Rangeline Street, Columbia, MO 65201

**Office:** 573-476-0022 | Fax: 573-476-0023  
[help@clarity-healthcare.org](mailto:help@clarity-healthcare.org)

[clarity-healthcare.org](http://clarity-healthcare.org)

## When it snows

As winter weather approaches, we want our families to know how snow days will be handled.

School will be canceled, or a 2-hour delayed start implemented, only after roads are tested. Should cancellation or a 2-hour delayed start be necessary, efforts will be made to notify radio and television stations by 6 a.m. If a decision can be made earlier than 6 a.m., the district will make every effort to do so. Information will also be sent via the district's parent messaging system, posted on the district's website, and on CPS-TV.

Parents may make the final decision regarding their student's attendance. If the parent views the weather too severe or the road conditions too dangerous, absences will be excused.

Difficulty in contacting parents usually prevents early dismissals, but under appropriate circumstances, the district may dismiss early. On inclement weather days, please continue listening to local radio and television stations for news of early dismissal. Additionally, information will be sent via the district's messaging system.

Your student's school and the district will provide direction and information on alternative methods of instruction (AMI) on winter weather days. Additionally, your student's school will provide information related to specific after-school activities as each school building will have different scheduling and rescheduling needs.

### STAY INFORMED

Parents and guardians are automatically signed up to receive text, phone and email messages from your student's school and the district via the district's parent messaging system. If you are not receiving text messages and emails, please contact the registrar at your child's school(s) to update your contact information. E-mail and text messages will be sent in the event of a weather cancellation to parents with correct contact information on file with their student's school.

Check the school district website at [www.cpsk12.org](http://www.cpsk12.org).

Tune in to CPS-TV on Mediacom 81 or Spectrum 985 or view live and on-demand streaming on the CPS-TV website at [www.cpsk12.org/cpstv](http://www.cpsk12.org/cpstv). CPS-TV is also available on Roku, AppleTV and FireTV.

Download the free CPS mobile app on iTunes or GooglePlay. Search for Columbia Public Schools.

[www.cpsk12.org](http://www.cpsk12.org)