CONNECTION

Winter Edition | ISSUE NO. 26

In this edition

- Accomplishments Across the District
- Park Hill Voices
- Celebrations!

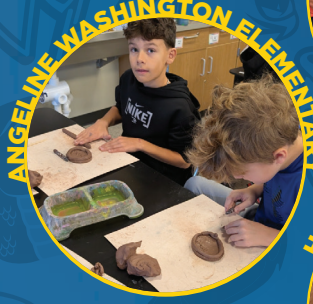


// English Landing Elementary, pictured here, is an AVID School of Excellence. Out of 8,000 schools nationwide, only 45 earned this honor.

Park Hill School District

Building Successful Futures • Each Student • Every Day





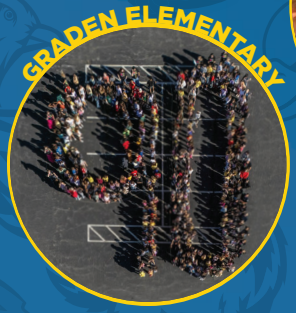












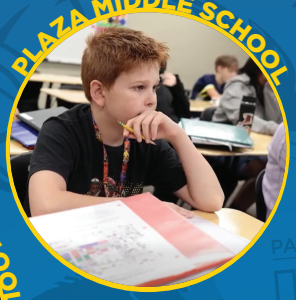


ONE DISTRICT. ONE COMMUNITY.

Building tomorrow together



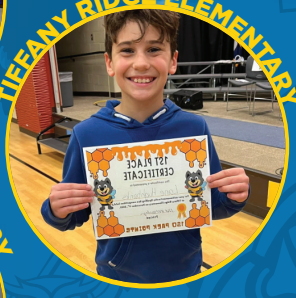






















Welcome to the CONNECTION

Connection is a publication of the Park Hill School District, distributed quarterly without charge, to every household within the Park Hill School District boundaries. Thank you for your support of our community schools.

Park Hill Board of Education

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// Hawthorn Elementary's Kindness Club decorated donation boxes for their non-perishable food drive.



STRAIGHT FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Happiest new year to you, Park Hill community! As we celebrate the start of 2026, we are grateful for the community's continued support of our students, staff and families. As you'll read about in this edition of the *Connection* magazine, we continue to excel academically in Park Hill. In our Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP), our strategic plan, we focus on academics, culture and systems. Our academic excellence, along with our work on culture and sense of belonging, depends on systems and facilities to match.

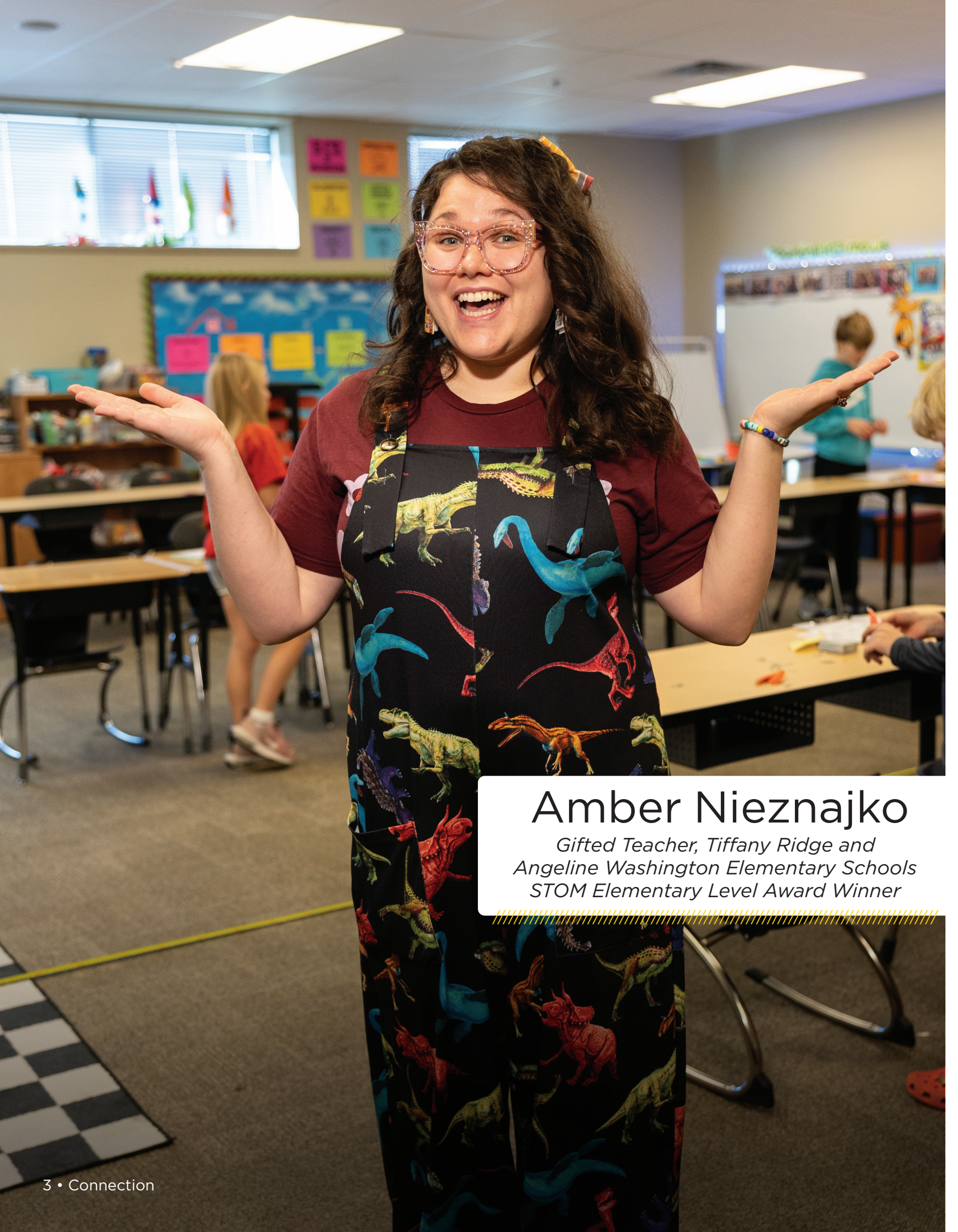
In Park Hill School District, we've had some of our highest achievement growth in math and English Language Arts (ELA). In the 2024-25 school year, all ACT scores increased for 12th grade students. We also had the highest number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) exams and the highest percentage of students earning 3+ in Park Hill School District's history. Students took 1,732 AP exams in 2025 and 80% of our students taking those exams scored a 3 or better.

Our district's Annual Performance Report (APR) score is 91.2% for 2025, issued by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This is our highest APR score in the past four years and among the highest scores in the Kansas City region and in the state.

Thank you for supporting our students in their academic journeys. Your encouragement and dedication to them shows and we couldn't do it without you – our community.

Michael J Kimbrel

Dr. Mike Kimbrel
Superintendent



Amber Nieznajko

Gifted Teacher, Tiffany Ridge and Angeline Washington Elementary Schools
STOM Elementary Level Award Winner

STRAIGHT FROM OUR Staff

Q What inspired you to become a teacher?

A I wanted to become a teacher for a few reasons. The first was that my grandmother worked in education when she was younger, and she always spoke so fondly about her experiences. She believed that teaching was one of the most influential careers someone could choose, and hearing her stories made a deep impression on me.

I was also inspired by my own fourth grade teacher, who changed the course of my life. I had learning disabilities and struggled a lot in school. She was the first teacher who truly saw me. She helped me develop a growth mindset, find confidence and get the support I needed. The impact she had on me made me want to be that person for other students. Becoming a teacher felt like a way to honor both her and my grandmother while giving back in the same meaningful way.

Q How do you make science engaging and accessible for young students? Can you share a classroom moment or project that made a lasting impact?

A Science is at the heart of so much of what we already do. I make science engaging by grounding lessons in experiences students can see, touch and question. Whether it's using simple materials to model complex ideas or connecting concepts to real life situations, I try to create an environment where students feel safe to experiment and make mistakes.

It's hard to choose just one because two experiences stand out as especially meaningful. The first was when our 4th graders had the opportunity to go indoor skydiving. Students spent the day learning STEM concepts from experts, watching demonstrations inside the wind tunnel and even going indoor skydiving themselves. Watching their faces light up as they made real world connections to the science behind flight was unforgettable. For many of them, it was the first time science felt thrilling and truly within their reach.

Another favorite moment was the month long space camp at the Summer Innovation program that I helped write and teach this past summer. We planted seeds that had actually been to space, received shout-outs from astronauts and spent each day doing hands-on experiments inspired by real space missions. Seeing students come in excited every morning, eager to explore and ask questions, reminded me how powerful immersive learning can be. Both experiences showed me the impact of giving students opportunities that spark curiosity and expand their sense of what's possible.



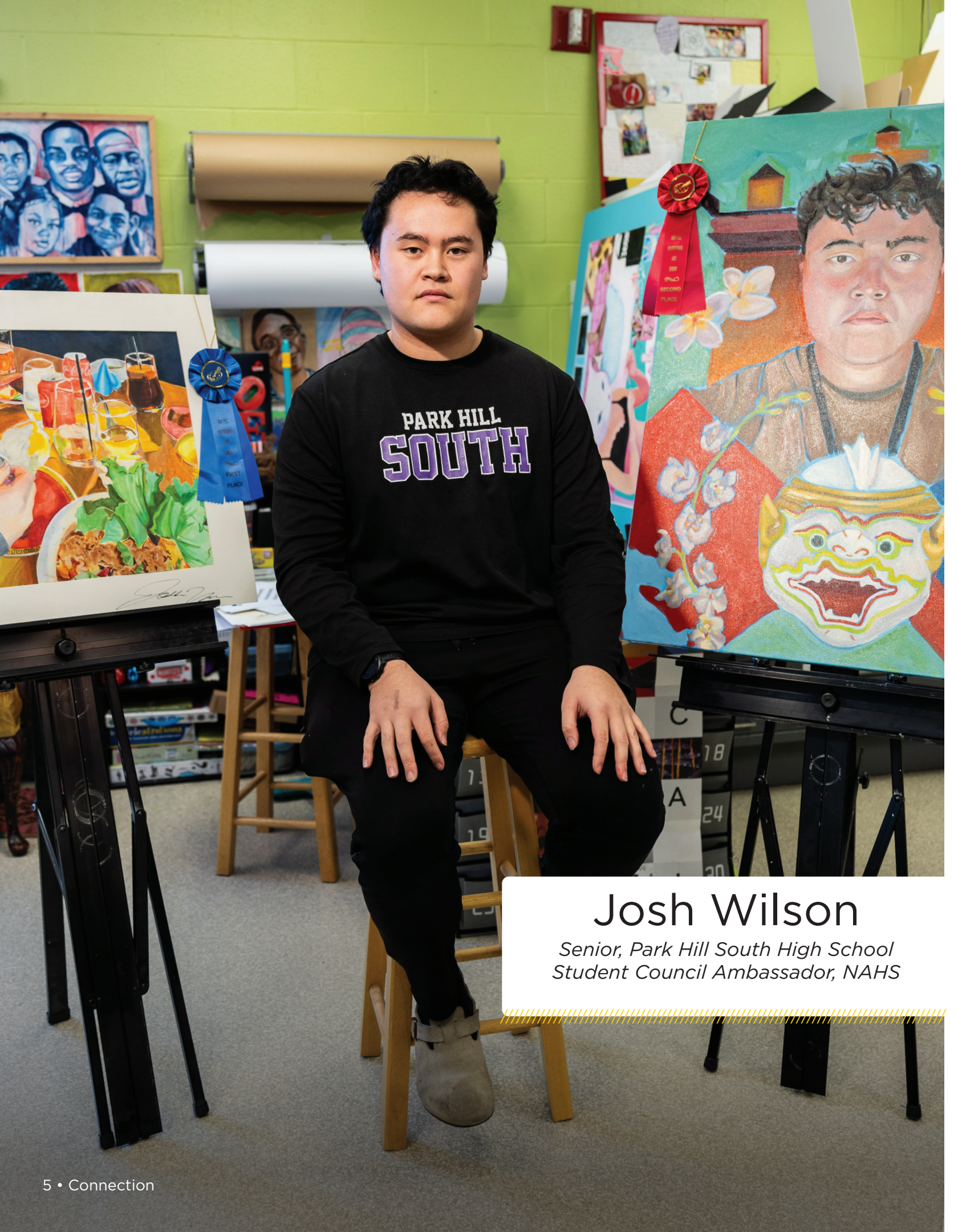
Q What does receiving the Science Teachers of Missouri (STOM) award mean to you personally and professionally?

A Receiving the STOM award is incredibly meaningful. Personally, it's humbling to be recognized for work that I genuinely love doing every day. Professionally, it motivates me to continue pushing myself to create hands-on, engaging science experiences for students.

It also feels a bit like a Ms. Frizzle moment for me, a reminder to keep taking chances, making mistakes and getting messy right alongside my students. The award reinforces the importance of joyful, curiosity-driven learning, and it encourages me to keep bringing that spirit into my classroom and sharing it with colleagues across the district.

Q How does your work in the classroom support the district's goals for academic achievement?

A My teaching aligns closely with Park Hill's focus on learning through experiences and inquiry. I create hands-on lessons that encourage students to explore, ask questions and discover concepts for themselves. When students learn by doing, they stay engaged and build strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills. This experiential, inquiry-driven approach supports deeper understanding and directly contributes to the district's goals for academic success.



Josh Wilson

Senior, Park Hill South High School
Student Council Ambassador, NAHS

STRAIGHT FROM OUR *Students*

Q **You were recently named Student Council Ambassador for the National Art Honor Society, one of only eight ambassadors across the country. What inspired you to apply for this role?**

A I was inspired to apply for this role because it was a way I could get more connected with art. My art teacher gave me a form to apply and I thought it would be a great way to better connect with art. I'm applying to art school and always looking for more ways I can get connected. Being a part of the council is something I enjoy as well as something preparing me for my future.



Q **Tell us more about the selection process. How did you prepare? Were there specific projects, classes or teachers that supported you?**

A The application felt a lot like a resume; I had to share my extracurriculars and explain why I'd be a strong fit for the council. I think I was selected because I've pushed myself to grow artistically and stay involved. I've attended pre-college programs at both the Kansas City Art Institute and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and I've taken AP Art twice. I've also worked hard to put my artwork out there connecting me to the art community. My teacher, Mrs. Sulzen, wrote a recommendation highlighting my leadership in NAHS, and the entire art department has supported me along the way. Specifically, Mrs. Colvin, got me connected with the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art my sophomore year where I became a teen council member.

Q **What do you hope to achieve as an ambassador?**

A As an ambassador, I get the platform to talk with working artists and the opportunity to visit Washington, D.C. Speaking with other teens in NAHS chapters across the country also helps me see new ways I can improve NAHS at Park Hill South.

Q **You're a senior. What are your future plans, and in what ways could this experience influence them?**

A I'm currently applying to ten different art schools. This opportunity has helped me feel more connected to the art world, and it's given me more confidence in the path I'm choosing. I'm building my portfolio right now, and being an ambassador helps me stand out even more among my peers.





Park Hill continues to deliver outstanding results, both inside and outside the classroom. From strong academic performance to awards in finance, science education and the arts, these accomplishments reflect the dedication of our students, educators and community.

According to the 2024–25 Student Achievement Report, Park Hill students are demonstrating solid academic performance and growth. Seventy percent or more of students reached the NWEA* benchmark of scoring at or above grade level in reading and science, and grades K–7 reached this benchmark in math as well. Students are also showing meaningful progress, meeting projected growth targets in every grade meeting their fall-to-spring reading goals along with additional gains in math and science. These results highlight the steady progress happening in our classrooms and the strength of teaching and learning across the district.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recently released Park Hill's Annual Performance Report for the 2025 MSIP 6 cycle, and the results reaffirm our commitment to high-quality education. Park Hill earned an overall APR score of 91.2%, our highest score in the past four years and the strongest of the current MSIP cycle.

U.S. News & World Report also recognized our strong academic programs. Park Hill and Park Hill South were ranked as the top two traditional public high schools on the Missouri side of the Kansas City metro area. Statewide, Park Hill ranked 10th and Park Hill South ranked 12th, and all four of our middle schools were ranked among the best in Missouri.

Our talented educators continue to earn recognition as well. Amber Nieznajko, gifted teacher at Tiffany Ridge and Angeline Washington Elementary Schools, received the Science Teachers of Missouri Elementary Level Award for outstanding science instruction — a prestigious honor awarded to only two teachers statewide. The district also earned national financial recognition. Our Business Department and Assistant Superintendent for Business and Technology Services Dr. Paul Kelly received the Meritorious Budget Award from the Association of School Business Officials International for 2025–26, reflecting transparency, thoughtful planning and responsible stewardship.

Our students continue to excel at the highest levels. Park Hill South senior Khadra Ahmed received a competitive QuestBridge matching scholarship to Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn., earning a full four-year award through

270+
STUDENTS WINNING LOCAL, STATE, NATIONAL AWARDS



65
STAFF MEMBERS WINNING LOCAL, STATE, NATIONAL AWARDS

1
QUESTBRIDGE MATCH SCHOLAR

a program that connects exceptional students with top colleges. This fall, we celebrated six National Merit Semifinalists — a distinction earned by about 1% of the 1.3 million entrants nationwide based on PSAT/NMSQT performance. We also recently learned that nine Park Hill students were named National Merit Commended Students, recognized among about 34,000 students nationally for high achievement on the PSAT/NMSQT. Learn more about them on page 11.

In the arts, Park Hill South senior Josh Wilson was selected as a National Art Honor Society Student Council Ambassador — one of only eight students chosen nationwide. In athletics, the 2024–25 Park Hill High School boys and girls volleyball teams earned the American Volleyball Coaches Association Team Academic Award sponsored by INTENT.

Districtwide honors also reflect the strength of our leadership and our schools. The Missouri School Boards' Association recognized the Park Hill Board of Education with the 2025 Governance Team Award, one of only 23 districts statewide to receive the distinction. Park Hill was also named one of the Best Communities for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation for the fourth consecutive year.

Additional honors further highlight our district's excellence. Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Dr. Amy Dillon was named Missouri HR Administrator of the Year and Park Hill High School Assistant Principal Tom Garth earned statewide recognition from the Missouri Association of Student Councils as the Northwest Administrator of the Year.

These achievements echo what our community survey results tell us: nearly 90% of our community says Park Hill's reputation is a reason families choose to live within district boundaries, and 88% would recommend the district to someone new to the area. With construction beginning soon on the phased replacement of Park Hill High School, improvements to the stadium and fields at Park Hill South and additions at Chinn, Line Creek and Southeast Elementary Schools, we are excited about what's ahead for our students and community.

**NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) is an organization that provides widely used academic assessments for schools.*

1,387
ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAMS TAKEN BY STUDENTS

80% OF OUR STUDENTS TAKING THOSE EXAMS SCORED A **3 OR BETTER**

56% OF THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2025 SCORED HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE ON THE ACT

OVER 70%
OF STUDENTS

ACHIEVED AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL ON NWEA READING AND SCIENCE TESTS. K-7 REACHED THE BENCHMARK IN MATH, AS WELL

88%

OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS RECOMMEND PARK HILL SCHOOLS TO ANYONE NEW TO THE AREA

90%

OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS LINK PARK HILL AREA GROWTH TO DISTRICT'S REPUTATION

9

NATIONAL MERIT COMMENDED STUDENTS

91.2%

APR SCORE FOR 2025. THIS IS OUR HIGHEST SCORE IN THE PAST FOUR YEARS AND IT IS AMONG THE HIGHEST IN THE KC REGION AND IN THE STATE

P

2024

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21

ALL OF OUR SC
CERTIFIED CARDIA
RESPONSE TEAM
HAVE IMPLE
EMERGENCY
DRILLS IN
BUILDI

6
NATIONAL MERIT SEMIFINALISTS

LAKEVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL & ENGLISH LANDING ELEMENTARY ARE RECOGNIZED AS AVID NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION SCHOOLS AND ARE **RANKED AMONG THE TOP 45 SCHOOLS IN THE COUNTRY**

AVID®

29
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE PARTICIPATING IN ALL-STATE CHOIR, BAND AND/OR ORCHESTRA

ALL FOUR MIDDLE SCHOOLS WERE RECOGNIZED AS

PLTW
2024-2025 DISTINGUISHED GATEWAY SCHOOLS
FOR THEIR EFFORTS TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

PARK HILL SOUTH MUSIC & THEATER DEPARTMENT WON **OUTSTANDING OVERALL PRODUCTION** IN 2024 AND 2025

STARLIGHT Blue Star AWARDS

HEART SAFE SCHOOLS
SCHOOLS HAVE
DIAC EMERGENCY
AMS (CERT) AND
PLEMENTED
CY RESPONSE
S IN THEIR
LDINGS

KC SCHOLARS

57
STUDENTS
EARNED AWARDS THROUGH KC SCHOLARS

ASBO AWARDS PARK HILL SCHOOL DISTRICT THE **MERITORIUS BUDGET AWARD (MBA)** FOR 19 YEARS IN A ROW

ASSOCIATION of SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS INTERNATIONAL ASBO

WE ARE #ParkHillProud

These are just a few of the awards and accolades Park Hill staff and students have received recently. Visit our website to catch up on the latest honors!

Visit
www.parkhill.k12.mo.us/news-and-stories
to catch up on the latest.



Congratulations to our **Business Department and Assistant Superintendent for Business and Technology Services, Dr. Paul Kelly**, on earning the Meritorious Budget Award (MBA) from the Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) for 2025–2026! This recognition celebrates excellence in budget presentation and reflects our district's strong commitment to sound financial management and budgetary policies.







We are #ParkHillProud of our nine National Merit Commended Students from across the district.

Congratulations to **Park Hill High's Andrew Ampon, Nick Demas (LEAD Innovation Studio), Robby Hanna-White, Chancellor Kaufman and Aisling Westenkirchner (LEAD Innovation Studio)**. And to **Park Hill South's Roberto Shepherd, Nathan Smith, Connor Thompson and Arha Veraepalli.**

Out of 1.3 million entrants nationwide, these seniors are among approximately 34,000 students recognized as National Merit Commended Students for their strong performance on the 2024 PSAT/NMSQT.





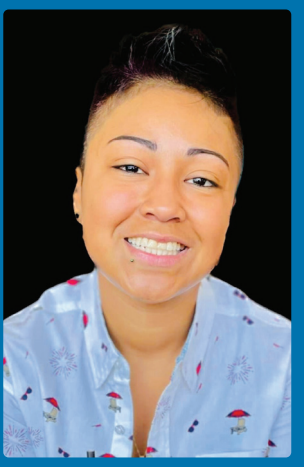

Please congratulate our Park Hill South broadcast students who excelled at Student Television Network (STN) 4-State, held recently at Missouri State University.

We're #ParkHillProud of junior **Melisa Taletovic** who earned first place in Solo Anchor! South also placed in five of 11 varsity broadcast events, and the entire broadcast and film staff met deadlines in all 18 events entered.

The competition included top programs from Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Arkansas, as well as at-large schools from Kentucky, Alabama, Texas and Pennsylvania.







We are #ParkHillProud of Congress Middle School Custodian **Shane Williams** and Hawthorn Elementary Custodian **Justina Garcia** for achieving the Missouri School Plant Manager Association's Facility Managers CORE Certification. The program teaches key strategies for building a high-performing custodial team, maintaining a safe and healthy school environment, developing leadership and communication skills and demonstrating business ethics. Park Hill now has 11 employees who have the CORE certification.

We are #ParkHillProud of our newest Project ADAM certified school, **Angeline Washington Elementary**. All of our schools have certified Cardiac Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and have implemented emergency response drills in their buildings.

Project ADAM's goal is to save lives by empowering schools to be prepared for a cardiac emergency with a practiced plan. Through the program, schools designated as being heart safe get continued support, training and recertification on a regular basis.

Park Hill middle schools are making the grade—literally! ***U.S. News & World Report*** **ranked all four of our middle schools among the Best Middle Schools in the state!**

CONGRESS MIDDLE SCHOOL

LAKEVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL

PLAZA MIDDLE SCHOOL

WALDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL



We are #ParkHillProud of Park Hill High School senior **Ruby Bell** for earning All-State honors at the MSHSAA Girls Class 4 Golf Championship. After 36 holes over two days, she placed 10th out of 92 state qualifiers, securing the first All-State medal of her career.

We are #ParkHillProud of **Amber Nieznajko**, gifted teacher at Tiffany Ridge and Angeline Washington Elementary Schools, for being named the Science Teachers of Missouri (STOM) Elementary Level Award Winner for outstanding science instruction!

This prestigious award honors two educators — one elementary, one secondary — who exemplify the very best in science teaching. Amber was chosen for bringing three-dimensional learning to life, inspiring curiosity, fostering deep understanding and preparing students to think and act like scientists.

As STOM noted, "Amber's dedication serves as a model for colleagues across the state and reflects the highest ideals of the profession."









Congratulations to members of the Park Hill South boys and girls cross country teams on their performance at the MSHSAA Class 5 State Cross Country race.

The girls team had two representatives, **Madilynn Conklin** and **Zoe Flook**. Conklin finished in the top 10, running to a ninth-place finish overall and her fourth All-State finish.

The boys team finished 13th overall with senior **Simon Ketter** taking 49th individually. We are also #ParkHillProud of **Colton Hardy** from Park Hill High School who qualified for the state meet.

Shoutout to Park Hill South senior **Josh Wilson**, who was selected to be a National Art Honor Society Student Council Ambassador. Only eight high school students are selected throughout the nation for this committee. Josh was selected for his passion for the visual arts, design and media arts.



Congratulations to the **Park Hill High School girls volleyball teams from 1987 to 2000** on being inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame. During that time, the Trojans earned 11 state tournament berths, finishing in the Final Four each of those seasons.

This era of excellence included:

- 19 All-State athletes
- 42 collegiate players
- Nine conference championships
- 11 district titles
- Three Class 4 state championships
- A 415–87–24 record, including eight 30-win seasons

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PARK HILL Highlight

Considered one of the top high school basketball players in the nation, Park Hill South senior Addison Bjorn announced that she will attend the University of Texas next year to play basketball.

In addition to her domination for the Panthers, Addison also played for the United States Junior National Basketball team in the summer of 2024 where she helped the team win Gold.

At the time of her signing, Addison was the tenth-ranked recruit by ESPN in the Class of 2026.



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