

Ritenour NEWS

A Ritenour School District Publication | July 2025

Meet Maizy: Ritenour Middle School's Newest Support Therapist

Ritenour Middle School welcomed a very special new staff member this spring. Maizy, the only four-legged staff member with a continuously wagging tail, has the uncanny ability to know exactly who needs her the most.

Maizy is a 5-year-old miniature Bernese-Doodle mix, and is Ritenour's first certified touch-therapy dog. Twice a week, she walks the halls with her handler, RMS school counselor Kim Sagakhaneh, and greets students in the counseling office.

Calm, gentle and always up for a snuggle, Maizy already has won the hearts of students, staff and parents.

"She just knows who needs her," Sagakhaneh said as they walk the halls during morning arrival, during passing periods or afternoon dismissal. "She can find the ones who really need her."

Maizy's path to RMS started more than a year ago when Sagakhaneh and Principal Angela Chatman began talking about how a therapy dog might help students with social-emotional support.

Thereafter, Sagakhaneh and Maizy enrolled in Duo Dog's touch therapy certification program. During an 18-week training program, including an intensive six weeks of two-hour sessions, Maizy was trained to stay calm in high-stress situations, connect with people and follow advanced commands.

Maizy passed every test, including the final Canine Good Citizen exam, without the use of treats as an incentive. Sagakhaneh also passed a rigorous exam.

Now, Maizy spends most of her school days sitting in on individual and group

counseling sessions and is adept at breaking down emotional barriers. On her very first day of work at RMS, Maizy already made huge headway with students.

"The pressure is off the students because they are paying attention to her," said Sagakhaneh. "It's like they're almost talking to her instead of me."

Students acknowledge what a huge difference it is to have some time with Maizy when they are having a tough day.

Ava, an RMS eighth-grader, agrees. "When I'm feeling bad, she knows and makes me feel better. I can really focus better after being with her."

In addition to spending time in the counseling office and walking the halls, Maizy makes classroom visits to bring love and smiles to students. But students aren't the only ones benefiting from her - staff often stop by for what Sagakhaneh calls "a quick Maizy fix."

Although Maizy keeps up her enthusiasm and energy at school, Sagakhaneh said that when they arrive home at the end of a full school day, her four-footed colleague is ready for a nap. "She's completely exhausted when we get home!"

In addition to working as a team at RMS, Maizy and Sagakhaneh are involved in volunteer activities and community events as part of the Duo Dog program. Sagakhaneh said they have already participated in a walk to support Cystic Fibrosis and plan to volunteer monthly at Ranken Jordan Pediatric Hospital.



Maizy, Ritenour Middle School's touch-therapy dog, brings smiles to students during the school day. School Counselor Kim Sagakhaneh says she is a welcome addition to the counseling department.



Looking Back and Moving Forward: A Year of Success and Progress in Ritenour

Superintendent Dr. Chris Kilbride



“Thank you for your continued support. I am honored to continue to serve our community as superintendent. As a district, we look forward to continuing this important work with our community in the years ahead.”

-Dr. Chris Kilbride

As we reflect on the 2024-2025 school year, we are proud to share the impact of our districtwide theme: “Focus on Possibilities, Not Obstacles.” This guiding principle shaped our efforts and mindset throughout a year of tremendous progress and transformation in Ritenour.

Over the past school year, we fully implemented Competency-Based Education (CBE) across all grade levels. This shift from traditional instruction and grading models to a more personalized, mastery-based approach allows students to demonstrate learning through clear evidence of understanding. Students are empowered to “level up” when working toward proficiency. Ritenour is proud to be the only school district in the state of Missouri with a full set of proficiency scales for every grade (from kindergarten through 12th grade) to guide student learning and measure mastery.

To support this new approach, we introduced the Empower platform, a learning system that tracks evidence of student mastery and helps families, students and staff clearly understand what success looks like at each grade level. While this shift was significant, and at times challenging, it was a necessary step in aligning our practices with our commitment to deeper, more meaningful learning. With a “Know Better, Do Better” approach, we are confident our shared efforts with Empower will result in improved

consistency and outcomes for our students.

Additionally, we successfully transitioned to the PowerSchool student information system, replacing our previous platform, which no longer supported K-12 schools. This change has helped streamline communication and access to student data across the district for staff, students and families.

Taking on even one of these initiatives in a single school year would have been a major accomplishment. The fact that we tackled all three reflects the resilience, hard work and dedication of our school community. This shows that we are willing to stretch ourselves in order to improve outcomes for every Ritenour student.

As we look ahead, we are excited to announce our theme for the 2025-2026 school year: “Harmonize.” We believe it is our responsibility to create unity, shared purpose and balance in everything we do. As leaders, we are accountable for developing a level of harmony in a dynamic system in the best interest of students. Together, we will continue building a solid foundation that supports *Every Student, Every Day*, with a collective focus on alignment, equity and excellence.

Thank you for your continued support. I am honored to continue to serve our community as superintendent. As a district, we look forward to continuing this important work with our community in the years ahead.

Ritenour Board of Education Elects New Officers

The Ritenour Board of Education re-elected Dr. Brad Thomas as president and Jennifer Lohnes as vice president at its meeting on April 10, 2025. Thomas is the Board’s longest-serving member and has been a Board Director for the past 25 years. Lohnes has been a board member since 2016 and this is her second term as vice president.

In addition, Reagan Beverly, Ritenour High School class of 2026, was announced as the new student representative on the Ritenour Board of Education. She replaces Alazaya Rhae Smith, who served a one-year term as the student representative.

The Ritenour Board of Education meeting schedule, policies and historical information are available on the Ritenour website - www.ritenourschools.org.

RITENOUR Board of Education



Dr. Brad Thomas
President



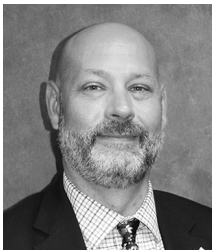
Jennifer Lohnes
Vice President



Dr. M. Stacey
Albin-Wilson
Director



Penny Degardin
Director



Rob Eaton
Director



Lisa Glover-Jones
President



Vanessa
Henriquez-Pimblott
Director

Dr. Chris Kilbride—Superintendent | DeQuinda Woods—Secretary | Dr. Phil Pusateri—Treasurer | Reagan Beverly—Student Representative

Ritenour Embraces AI to Support Learning with Responsible Use Plan

The Ritenour School District is taking a thoughtful step into the future by introducing artificial intelligence (AI) as a learning tool, with clear guidelines to ensure its responsible and ethical use.

Approved by the Ritenour Board of Education in February 2025, the district's AI Use Plan outlines how AI can be used to support student learning while protecting data and ensuring safety. It builds on policies established in June 2024 that set clear expectations for AI use across Ritenour schools.

"We recognize the potential benefits of AI in education and are committed to using it responsibly," said Dr. Rich Wilson, Ritenour's director of technology. "Our plan ensures that AI is used as a tool to support learning while keeping student and staff data secure."

An AI workgroup of Ritenour educators, administrators and staff helped shape the plan.

"AI can be a powerful tool, but we must understand its limitations and ethical concerns," Dr. Wilson added.

Ritenour emphasizes keeping "humans in the loop," with teachers guiding students in safe and meaningful ways.

The district approved three tools this spring that are secure and age-appropriate for teachers to use with students: SchoolAI, MagicSchool and Curipod. Educators must submit proposals for other AI tools to Dr. Wilson for approval.

"We want to empower educators with AI while maintaining ethical safeguards," said Dr. Wilson. "By taking a thoughtful approach, we can enhance learning while protecting our students and staff."

Staff will receive ongoing training, and students and families will review the AI guidelines annually, starting with the 2025-2026 Student Handbook.

To read more about the AI Use Plan, visit www.ritenourschools.org/ai.

Ritenour Names New Administrators at Marion and Marvin Elementary Schools

The Ritenour School District is pleased to announce the appointment of new administrators at Marvin and Marion elementary schools, effective July 1.

Dr. Melissa Crowley is the new principal at Marvin Elementary School. For the past two school years she has been the assistant principal at Marion Elementary School.

Dr. Crowley's 19 years of educational experience have all been in the Ritenour School District. After spending her first 12 years as a classroom teacher at Iveland Elementary, she was an instructional coach for five years at Marvin and Kratz elementary schools before joining Marion as assistant principal.

"We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Melissa Crowley as the next principal of Marvin Elementary," said Ritenour Superintendent Dr. Chris Kilbride. "Melissa is a dedicated and student-centered educator and proven leader who knows our district, our families, and our students exceptionally well. Her deep roots in Ritenour and passion for student success make her the ideal person to lead Marvin into its next chapter. We're excited for all she will accomplish in her new role."

Crowley earned a bachelor's in elementary education from the University of Missouri-St. Louis and two master's degrees from Lindenwood University and Maryville University. She also earned a doctorate in educational leadership at Maryville.

Dr. Crowley replaces Dr. Craig Thurman, who announced earlier this spring that he is moving out of state to become a principal in another school district.

Joining Crowley at Marvin as an assistant principal is **Jennifer Nilges**, a Ritenour graduate and veteran educator with 27 years of service in the district. She transitions to Marvin after serving seven years as assistant principal at Hoech Middle School. She started her career as a social studies teacher at Ritenour High School and then served as an assistant principal before moving to Hoech.

Nilges replaces Donna Butler, who retired from Marvin at the end of the 2024-2025 school year.

Replacing Crowley as assistant principal at Marion Elementary is **Dr. Matthew Macko**, who has spent his 12-year educational career in Ritenour. He most recently served as the district's facilitator for curriculum and effective teaching practices at the secondary level for the 2024-2025 school year. He also taught at Wyland Elementary and Ritenour Middle School and then became an instructional coach for English language arts and science at the middle school level.



Dr. Melissa Crowley



Jennifer Nilges



Dr. Matthew Macko

Ritenour High School Celebrates Class of

The Ritenour community celebrated Ritenour High School's 107th Commencement on May 31 at Chaifetz Arena with its largest class in 15 years - 454 graduates.

The class of 2025 proved they could rise above the disruptions that the COVID pandemic caused during their freshman year by making the most of their high school experience during their final three years of high school. They marked their final year as Huskies by earning more than \$11.4 million in college scholarships.

This year's senior class also showed tremendous Husky spirit with the highest attendance in recent memory at senior events, including lock-ins, senior sunrise and the senior picnic, said Crystal Spearman, assistant principal of the senior class.

Dr. Bruce Green, Ritenour's assistant superintendent for secondary education and lead administrator of RHS, inspired the class of 2025 with an adaptation of "The Pencil's Tale," as he compared them to the greatness of a pencil during his graduation speech:

"Everything you do will leave a mark," said Dr. Green. "Like a pencil on paper, your actions, big or small, make an impact. Every word, every decision, every choice leaves a trail. Make it count.

"You can always correct your mistakes," Dr. Green added. "Just as a pencil has an eraser, you have the ability to make things right. Failure is not final. Learn from it, grow, and rewrite your story when needed. What's inside matters most. The real value of a pencil is the graphite inside, not the wood or design.

Likewise, your character, integrity, and heart matter far more than how you appear on the outside."

The class of 2025 also received inspiration from two of their classmates. Maryam Ahmadi, who moved to the United States from Afghanistan when war made it unsafe, gave her classmates a greater appreciation for their freedom and right to a high school education and beyond.

"You are meant to become the best version of yourself, to love yourself, to love the world and to have hope," Ahmadi said. "If there is hardship, there is also hope. Don't give up, the best is yet to come."



f 2025 Graduation



Kennedy Beverly, who earned a full scholarship to Southern Illinois University Edwardsville to pursue a degree in nursing, challenged her fellow Huskies to be bold as they begin a new chapter in their lives:

“Class of 2025, walk into your future with your head high and your roots deep,” said Beverly. “Don’t just chase success, chase significance. Be the one who lights up a room. Be the one who builds bridges. Be the one who remembers where they came from and keeps climbing.”



Use your camera app to scan this QR code on your smartphone to view a highlight video and photographs from the 2025 RHS Graduation ceremony.

<https://tinyurl.com/RitenourGrad25>



(From top left, clockwise)

The Class of 2025 made history as Ritenour's largest graduating class in 15 years, with 454 proud graduates receiving their diplomas.

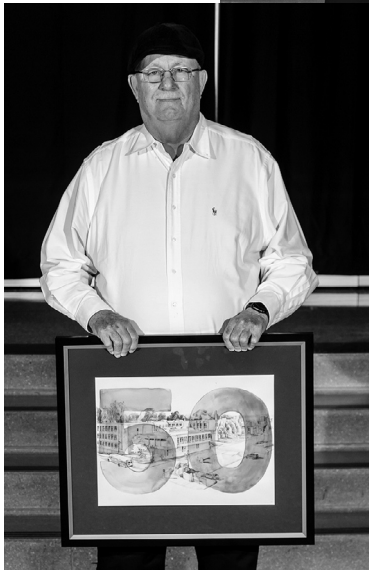
Seniors Maryam Ahmadi and Kennedy Beverly delivered powerful and heartfelt speeches, inspiring their fellow graduates and everyone in attendance.

Joy and pride filled the air as Ritenour graduates celebrated a milestone moment during the district's 107th commencement ceremony at Chaifetz Arena.

Highlights of the Class of 2025:

- Seventeen seniors graduated with the Missouri Seal of Biliteracy in Spanish, French and Dari/Persian.
- Twenty students earned Industry Recognized Certificates from RHS and North Technical School.
- Seven graduates earned a high school diploma and an associate's degree from St. Louis Community College-Florissant Valley through Ritenour's dual enrollment program. Another graduate is finishing her associate's degree this summer.
- Six seniors were admitted early decision to Washington University in St. Louis with scholarships and financial aid packages that covered all expenses. Another student earned the prestigious national QuestBridge Scholarship to attend Washington University.
- A dozen student-athletes will pursue their athletic careers in college in cheerleading, football, softball, baseball, soccer and as feature twirlers.

Ritenour Honors Teachers and Staff at Annual Event



(Top, l to r) Teacher of the Year Elizabeth Harms, Employee of the Year Alejandro Tagle, Make a Difference Award recipient Tavonda Palmer Harvey, First Class Teacher Julie Christopher

(Bottom) The district proudly honored its longest-serving employee, Glenn Taylor, who marked 50 years of service in 2025. Taylor is Ritenour's Maintenance Supervisor.

The Ritenour School District honored special staff members at the annual Honors Dinner on April 24, 2025, in the Ritenour Auditorium.

The district honored Diamond Circle Award recipients, First-Class Teacher and Make a Difference Award recipients, 25-year employees, and 2024-2025 retirees.

Ritenour is proud to honor **Elizabeth Harms**, an English language learner teacher at Marvin Elementary, as the 2025 Diamond Circle Teacher of the Year. **Alejandro Tagle**, a district maintenance professional and wrestling coach, is the Diamond Circle Employee of the Year. The district also celebrated 10 other Diamond Circle teachers, an honor given to teachers who best exemplify the district's commitment to quality education and service.

Tavonda Palmer Harvey, director of Husky Academy, was honored as the 2025 Make a Difference Award recipient for going above and beyond in meeting the needs of her students by removing barriers on their path to graduation. **Julia Christopher**, a second grade teacher at Iveland Elementary, is the district's First Class Teacher for being an outstanding educator who is new to the profession.

2025 Diamond Circle Teachers

- **Julie Lewis**, Buder Elementary
- **Logan Felder**, Iveland Elementary
- **Nicole Damaso**, Kratz Elementary
- **Maria Gilmore**, Marion Elementary
- **Elizabeth Harms**, Marvin Elementary
- **Christina Hardie**, Wyland Elementary

2025 Diamond Circle Teachers (Continued)

- **Maria Fassett**, Hoech Middle School
- **Dr. Carrie Brumm**, Ritenour Middle School
- **Molly Dahlquist**, Ritenour High School
- **Wilma Higgins**, Husky Academy

Retirees

- **David Appelbaum**, Ritenour High School
- **Brad Black**, Hoech Middle School
- **Michelle Bouknecht**, Ritenour Middle School
- **Stacy Brummet**, Hoech Middle School
- **Donna Butler**, Marvin Elementary
- **Marvin Collins**, Ritenour Middle School
- **Joan Clarke**, Hoech Middle School
- **Jill Fryer**, School for Early Childhood Education/SSD
- **Shelly Givens**, Transportation
- **Laura Jones**, Ritenour School District
- **Ann Moershell**, School for Early Childhood Education/SSD
- **Pamela Montgomery**, Marion Elementary
- **Tara Murray**, Ritenour Middle School
- **Christina Northrup-Thompson**, Ritenour High School
- **Barbara Perales**, Iveland Elementary
- **Karen Perry**, Buder Elementary
- **Michelle Sagakhaneh**, Marion Elementary
- **Stacy Shipman**, Iveland Elementary
- **Catherine Wade**, Ritenour Middle School
- **Becky Williams**, Kratz Elementary
- **Bethany Williams**, Wyland Elementary
- **Lisa Wirtz-Hampton**, Ritenour High School

25-Year Employees

- **Kent Adams**, School for Early Childhood Education
- **David Appelbaum**, Ritenour High School
- **Stacey Bray**, Wyland Elementary
- **Maggie Drummond**, Hoech Middle School
- **Jennifer Espenschied**, Buder Elementary
- **Louise Haar-Chapman**, Ritenour High School
- **Drew Lohnes**, Ritenour High School
- **Betty Satterley**, Ritenour School District

50-Year Employee

- **Glenn Taylor**, Ritenour School District

Ritenour to Host Back-to-School Resource Fair for Families on Saturday, Aug. 9

The Ritenour School District will host its first Back-to-School Resource Fair on Saturday, Aug. 9, 2025, from 9 a.m. to noon at Ritenour High School, 9100 St. Charles Rock Rd., to help ensure that students and families are ready for a successful start to the new school year.

This free event will offer families essential resources, including donated school supplies, health and wellness support, technology help, and information from numerous community partners. Representatives from various Ritenour departments will be

available to answer questions and provide guidance to families before school starts. The first day of school for PreK-12 is Monday, Aug. 18.

Translators will also be available to support multilingual families.

For more information, please visit www.ritenourschools.org or call (314) 493-6080.

Ritenour Announces 2025 Hall of Fame Inductees

The Ritenour School District is proud to announce its 2025 Hall of Fame inductees — three distinguished alumni and one esteemed Lifetime Achievement Award recipient — who have made a significant impact in their professions and communities.

The 2025 inductees are:

- **Suzy Fortune** | Class of 1981, an award-winning athlete, coach and educator, Fortune was a college hall of fame athlete before serving more than 28 years as a teacher and coach at Ritenour High School, retiring in 2021.
- **Tavonda Palmer Harvey** | Class of 2000, a celebrated Ritenour educator, Palmer Harvey has received numerous local, state and national awards, and serves as director of Ritenour Husky Academy.
- **Dr. David A. Smith** | Class of 1981, a decorated retired U.S. Air Force veteran, Dr. Smith serves as an administrative judge with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

- **Dr. Paul Doerr** | (*Lifetime Achievement Award*), a dedicated leader who served Ritenour for 24 years, including 11 years as superintendent, Dr. Doerr is recognized for his long-standing and transformative contributions to the district.

The induction ceremony will be held at 6 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 26, 2025, in the Ritenour Auditorium. Tickets for the dinner and induction ceremony are \$60 and can be purchased by calling (314) 493-6080 or emailing guntherm@ritenourschools.org. Reservations must be made by Sept. 15.

Established in 1997, the Ritenour Hall of Fame honors alumni who exemplify outstanding professional achievements, civic engagement, and community service. Portraits of the 110 current Hall of Fame members and 12 Lifetime Achievement Award recipients are displayed in the Ritenour High School Auditorium lobby.

Visit www.ritenourschools.org to view the entire list of Ritenour Hall of Fame inductees.

Ritenour High School Students Create Lasting Memories during 2025 Special Olympics

More than 300 Ritenour High School students hosted more than 200 athletes in April for the ninth annual Special Olympics Track & Field event.

On Ritenour's Moore Field, athletes from elementary and middle schools competed in track and field events, collecting ribbons and big smiles for their achievements. Athletes had a blast in running, jumping and softball-throw events while their RHS buddy cheered them on, shared high fives, and presented them with ribbons in each of their events.

Between the sporting events run by the Huskies track and field athletes, RHS buddies escorted their athletes to a variety of activities outside the stadium in the student-run Special Olympics Village. The village featured several games like bean bag toss, ring toss, Plinko and a giant version of Connect Four.

RHS sophomore Jayden Nelson, a sprinter on the Huskies track team, said she had a blast as a buddy for a Special Olympian from Iveland Elementary.

“I really enjoyed doing these track events with her because I loved teaching and showing her how much fun track can be,” said Nelson. “It’s great to see her enjoying this event.”

Special Olympians from Iveland, Kratz, Marion and Marvin elementary schools, as well as Hoech Middle and Ritenour Middle School participated with peers from outside the district who traveled to RHS from throughout the St. Louis area.

More than 200 athletes participated in the 2025 Special Olympics held at Ritenour High School on April 24. Over 300 RHS students helped organize and run the event, creating an inspiring day filled with teamwork, inclusion, and Husky pride.



Save the Date! 2025 Homecoming Set for Sept. 26-27

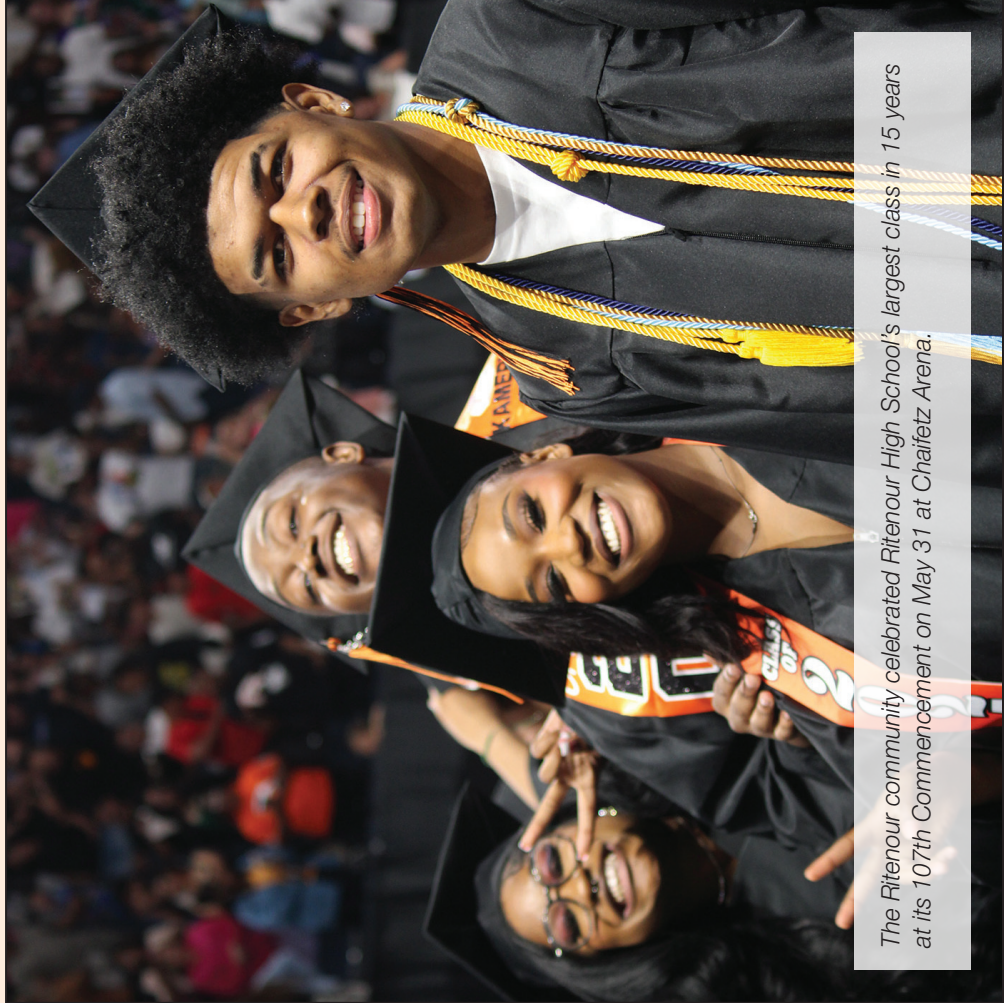


The Ritenour School District will celebrate Homecoming on Sept. 26 and Sept. 27!

The weekend festivities will kick off on Friday, Sept. 26 with the Hall of Fame dinner and induction ceremony at 6 p.m. The four members of the Hall of Fame class of 2025 will be enshrined during the ceremony (*you can read more about the new Hall of Fame members in the story above*).

On Saturday, Sept. 27, the football Huskies will take on the Lindbergh Flyers at 1 p.m. following the annual Homecoming parade at 9 a.m.

We hope you can join us for this fun and exciting weekend!



Ritenour Celebrates the Class of 2025!

Ritenour New Student Registration

Families new to the Ritenour School District can now register students in grades K–12 for the upcoming 2025–2026 school year at the Ritenour Administrative Center, located at 2420 Woodson Road in Overland, Mo.

Registration Hours:

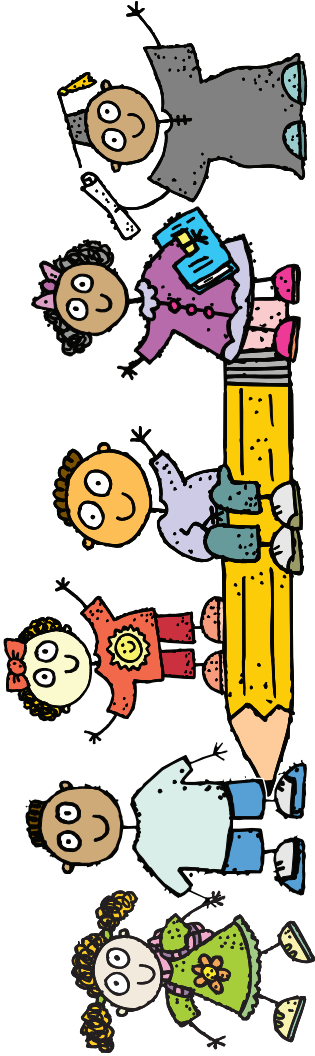
Monday – Friday
8:30 – 10:30 a.m. and 1 – 3 p.m.

Children must be 5 years old on or before July 31, 2025, to register for kindergarten.

To review registration requirements and complete necessary forms, please visit our Enrollment website at www.ritenourschools.org/enrollment.

For assistance or additional information, call our registration office at (314) 493-6048.

We strongly encourage families to register as early as possible to ensure students are ready to begin on the **first day of school on Monday, Aug. 18, 2025!**



The first day of school for the 2025-2026 school year is Monday, Aug. 18, 2025!