CONNECTION

Spring Edition | ISSUE NO. 27

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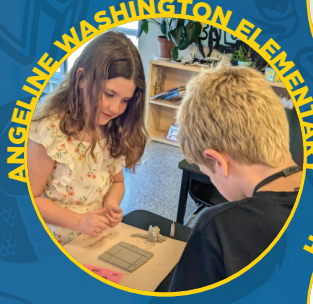


// Hopewell Elementary students participating in a "Brain Break" activity.

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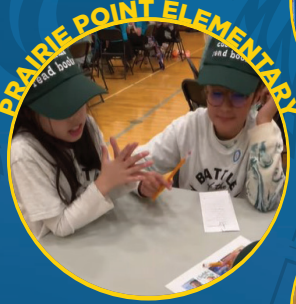
Building tomorrow together





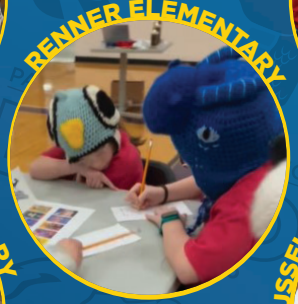




















Welcome to the CONNECTION

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.

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// Southeast Elementary students in Mrs. Sheldon's first grade class.



STRAIGHT FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

As we've been meeting with our CSIP Team (our strategic planning team) this year, we've been working through how our current plan needs to adjust for our future plan. We are still focusing on academics, culture and systems – all wrapped up in our goal of building successful futures for Park Hill students of all backgrounds.

In this edition of the *Connection* magazine, you'll read about our efforts to ensure a sense of belonging among our students, staff and community. We want our community to know that they belong in our schools, in our programs, in our courses, in our athletics and activities and in our spaces. We've had the opportunity, thanks to our community, to continue creating beautiful new facilities for our students, and our academics continue to shine. Academics, culture and systems – all contributing to a sense of belonging.

This spring we will be providing updates to our future strategic plan. We are looking forward to sharing those with you all soon.

Enjoy this springtime, a time for warmth and renewal.

Michael J Kimbrel

Dr. Mike Kimbrel
Superintendent



Kelsey Boggs

Special Education teacher
Congress Middle School

STRAIGHT FROM OUR *Staff*

Q When you think about belonging in our district, what does that look and feel like for students?

A Inclusion for my students signifies fostering a sense of belonging within their school environment and community, regardless of ability, background or identity. It manifests as all students uniting to learn, engage and flourish together. This approach encourages making the school a better space by prioritizing individuals over their perceived capabilities. Ultimately, it creates a second home where everyone is free to be their authentic selves, regardless of who they are or where they come from.



Q In your classroom, how do you help every student feel supported, valued and included?

A Inclusion for students can exhibit in various ways, tailored to individual needs. In my classroom, each student possesses unique abilities, prompting me to assess how to best support them all within the school as well as their community. My Teaching Assistants and I strive to promote inclusion daily, which may involve assisting our students in classes, sports and extracurricular activities. During these moments, we focus on making students feel comfortable and included by promoting genuine communication with their peers. We remind them to embrace their true selves while guiding them to make confident and thoughtful decisions.

Q Can you share a moment when you saw a student truly feel like they belonged?

A This semester, we have been focusing on creating Sensory Friendly Environments, including during assemblies. In early February, our entire school received training on becoming more inclusive during these events. Assemblies can often be overwhelming for some students, leading to overstimulation and, consequently, their inability to attend. At Congress, we wanted to ensure everyone felt included. As a result, we are introducing at least one sensory-friendly game during our assemblies, allowing all students to participate. This includes dimming the lights, limiting music and celebrating in a quieter manner.

During our practice sessions, all students, regardless of their abilities, took part. I witnessed all my students fully engage in the games and experience the assembly together. I have never seen them feel a greater sense of belonging than I did on that day. We are thrilled to implement this approach in all our assemblies so that each student can experience that wonderful feeling of inclusion.

Q How does belonging impact a student's confidence and learning?

A A sense of belonging significantly impacts a student's confidence and learning. When individuals feel included in their school and community, they flourish in their surroundings. This inclusive atmosphere motivates them to strive for excellence. Increased inclusion boosts self-efficacy, enhances self-esteem and elevates overall engagement.

Q What would you want families to understand about belonging and inclusion in our schools?

A Inclusion is our highest priority within the school district. Every day, we strive to ensure that every individual feels a sense of belonging. In our community, it is essential that everyone has a voice, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or ability.



Reagan Spisak

2026 DEIB Student Champion
Tiffany Ridge Elementary

STRAIGHT FROM OUR *Students*

Q When do you feel most welcome at school, and why?

A I feel most welcome at school in the mornings. All of our teachers stand outside their classroom doors to say "Hi" to the kids. On my way to my classroom, I can see a lot of my past teachers and say "Hi" to them before I start my day. It makes me feel welcome and happy when I enter the school. It is a great way to start my day!

Q We heard at the Hall of Fame event that you helped another student be a part of the group. What made you want to help them?

A I have known the student I helped become part of our kickball group since he was in kindergarten and I was in third grade. We have built a strong connection through the many experiences we have shared together. Mrs. Stamper and Mrs. Kuhn have given me many opportunities to work with students in specialized classrooms. I have played games in his classroom and helped him learn to take turns. I have also helped him use his Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device to communicate during that time. I am very thankful that I have been able to learn and grow with these students!



Q If every kid felt like they belonged at Park Hill, what would school be like?

A If every kid felt like they belonged at Park Hill, everyone would respect each other and respect each other's differences. People at school would respect how people look, where they are from and how they communicate.



Q What advice would you give to a student who feels left out?

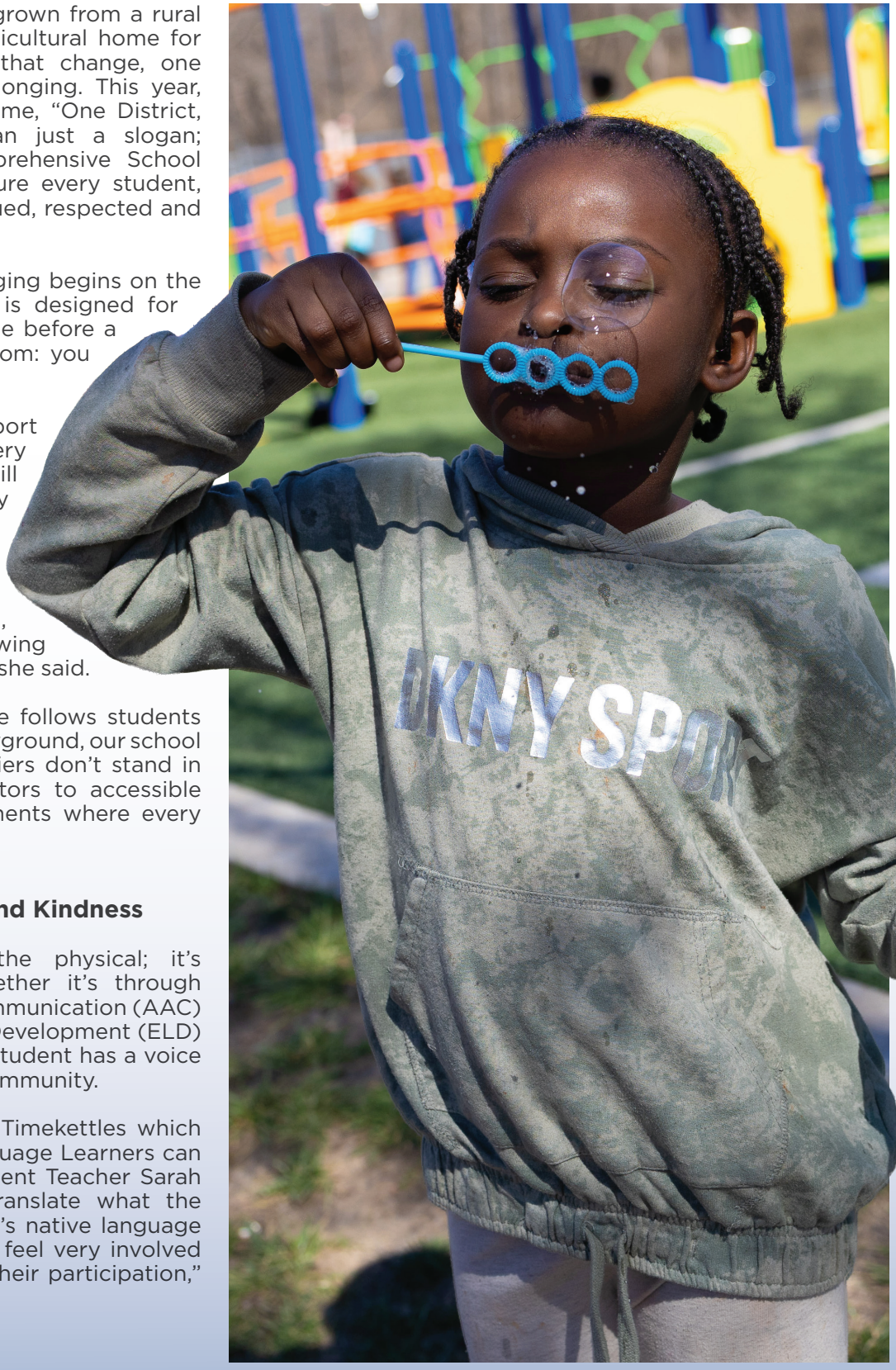
A If a student felt left out, I would tell them to go to one of their trusted people at school — someone they have built a strong connection with. The student could also talk with someone who is kind of like them and become friends.

ONE COMMUNITY:
Belonging in Park Hill

The Park Hill School District has grown from a rural community into a suburban, multicultural home for thousands of families. Through that change, one value has remained constant: belonging. This year, we leaned into that with our theme, "One District, One Community." It's more than just a slogan; it's a commitment in our Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) to ensure every student, staff member and family feels valued, respected and connected.

For our youngest students, belonging begins on the playground. When a play space is designed for everyone, it sends a clear message before a student even steps into a classroom: you are included here.

Thanks to the community's support of the 2022 Bond Issue, every elementary school in the district will have an accessible playground by the end of this summer. At Tiffany Ridge Elementary, that looks like ramps that allow every student to play on some of the equipment. But for second grader Flora Rangel, the highlight is simple. "I like the swing because they got a swing for me," she said.



That same sense of independence follows students inside the building. Beyond the playground, our school designs ensure that physical barriers don't stand in the way of learning. From elevators to accessible entries, we are building environments where every student can move with dignity.

Communication, Connection and Kindness

But belonging goes beyond the physical; it's also about communication. Whether it's through Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices or our English Language Development (ELD) programs, we are ensuring every student has a voice in our increasingly multicultural community.

"This year the district purchased Timekettles which are earbuds that our English Language Learners can use," English Language Development Teacher Sarah Longnecker said. The devices translate what the teacher is saying into the student's native language in real time. "It helps the student feel very involved in their classroom and increases their participation," she added.

Building a sense of belonging requires more than elevators and communication tools; it also requires a culture of intentional kindness. We see this in action at schools like Chinn Elementary, which was recognized as the Rita Blitt Kindest School by Synergy Services last year. This honor isn't just about being "nice." It recognizes a culture where students and staff go out of their way to make sure everyone feels seen and valued.

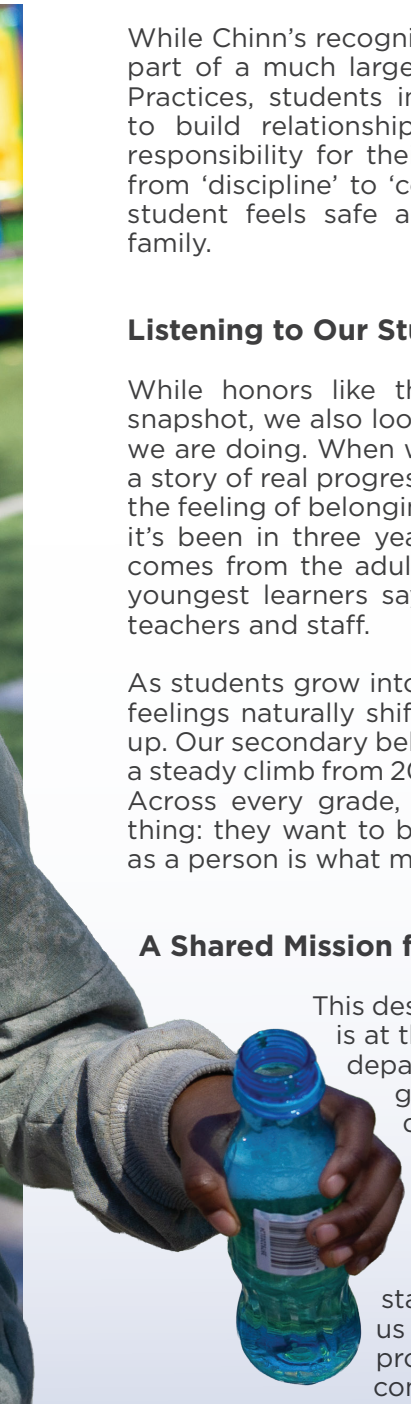
While Chinn's recognition is a standout moment, it is part of a much larger journey. Through Restorative Practices, students in all of our schools learn how to build relationships, resolve conflicts and take responsibility for their impact on others. It's a shift from 'discipline' to 'connection,' ensuring that every student feels safe and valued within their school family.

Listening to Our Students

While honors like the one at Chinn are a great snapshot, we also look to our students to tell us how we are doing. When we look at the numbers, we see a story of real progress. For our elementary students, the feeling of belonging hit 74% this fall — the highest it's been in three years. A big part of that success comes from the adults in our buildings; 83% of our youngest learners say they feel supported by their teachers and staff.

As students grow into middle and high school, those feelings naturally shift. Even so, the trend is moving up. Our secondary belonging score is at 49%, which is a steady climb from 2023, and mirrors national norms. Across every grade, our students tell us the same thing: they want to be "known." Feeling understood as a person is what matters most to them.

A Shared Mission for Inclusion



This desire to be known as an individual is at the heart of our Special Services department. While student surveys give us a big picture view, we dug deeper into the experiences of our families through our first Special Services Survey. We asked parents and guardians of our exceptional learners along with our special education staff to participate and provide us with baseline feedback for our programs. What we found was a community that deeply values this work: 73% of those responding agree the district is working hard to be inclusive.

"I think that's important," Special Services Coordinator Dr. John Liberto said. "It's reinforcing the culture component of our CSIP and that sense of belonging." When we asked where we should focus our energy next, the answer was clear — continuing to grow our inclusive practices is their top priority. And it reinforces our commitment to making sure every student is known, valued and supported.

Whether it is through a restorative conversation in an elementary hallway or a specialized plan in a high school classroom, we are staying true to the work we started nearly 75 years ago: to be one district, one community and one home for every student.





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.

QUEST BRIDGE



We are #ParkHillProud to share that **Khadra Ahmed**, a senior at Park Hill South, has matched with Macalester College through the QuestBridge program.

This year, QuestBridge's 55 college partners matched with 2,550 Finalists, who are recognized as Match Scholarship Recipients. Each recipient receives early admission and a full four-year scholarship.



We are #ParkHillProud of **Kristen Mitchell**, assistant principal at Hawthorn Elementary, who was named Assistant Principal of the Year by the Clay-Platte Region of the Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals!

Mitchell earned this award, in part, because she understands that strong school culture is built through relationships, consistency and intentional presence. She looks for opportunities to connect with students and staff in authentic ways, even during routine moments, and she models the kind of leadership that prioritizes people while maintaining high expectations.



Congratulations, **Chamberlain Webster**! The Park Hill High School senior has been named the Bronze Award recipient of the Missouri Good Citizens Award, presented by the Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution (MSSDAR).

She will be honored at the DAR State Conference in May.

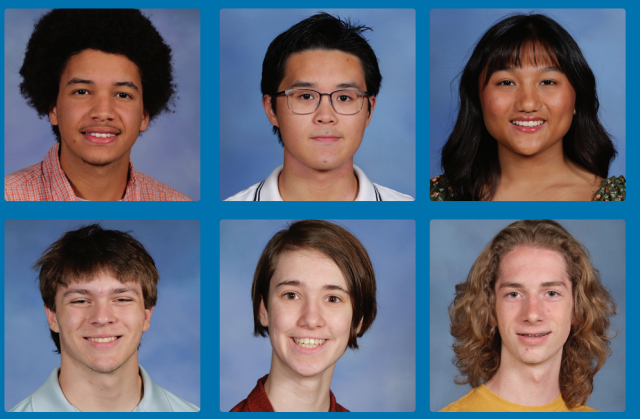
A standing ovation goes to our dance teams from Park Hill and Park Hill South high schools.

The Crimson Girls competed in the Dance Team Union national competition, placing in the top ten in multiple categories, including fourth in Gameday and seventh in Pom.

The Southside Girls competed in the National Dance Alliance competition, placing tenth in Medium Varsity Jazz and fourth in Medium Varsity Hip Hop.







Our National Merit Semifinalists are officially National Merit Finalists, a distinction earned by fewer than one percent of U.S. high school graduating seniors!

Park Hill High School: Malcolm Hunt, Kai Soo, and Angela Villamayor.
Park Hill South High School: Jonah Hicks, August Sturm (LEAD) and Jason Worcester.

Our students join a select group of scholars competing for nearly 7,000 scholarships worth almost $26 million to be awarded later in the spring.



Park Hill South High School girls swim and dive dominated the lanes at the Missouri Class 2 State Championships, taking home the team title with a massive 331 points!

While the whole roster showed incredible depth, join us in celebrating our individual state champions:

Aniya Clemons – One-meter Diving State Champ

Avery Hogue – 200 Individual Medley State Champ

200 Freestyle Relay – **Elisa DeCaro, Brooke Nichols, Avery Hogue and Ashlyn Hines**

April 8, 2026

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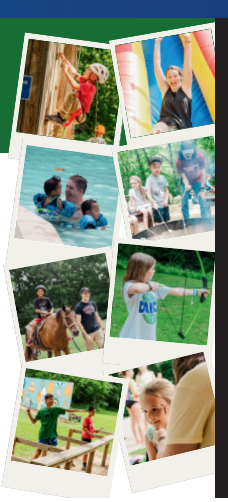
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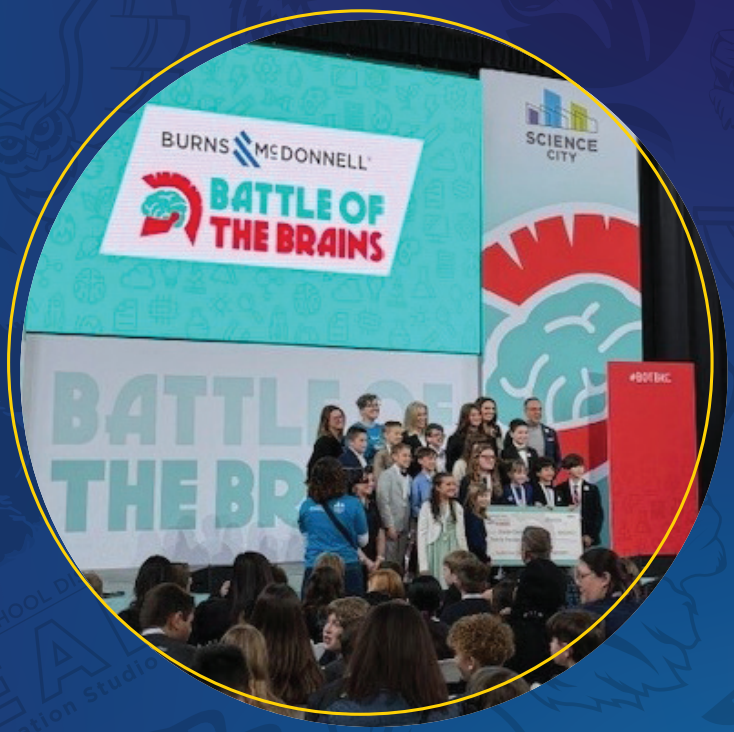
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PARK HILL Highlight

From top 20 to top 3! A huge congratulations are in order for the Bridges students at Graden Elementary. The fifth graders designed a cave exhibit for Battle of the Brains (a K-12 STEM competition), led by Bridges teacher Jacy Chastain-Ware.

The students won third place out of 710 teams at the Battle of the Brains ceremony at Union Station! They were recognized on stage and awarded $20,000 for their school.



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