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BENEATH THE RISING SUN P.10



A PUBLICATION OF USD 230 | WINTER 2024

SPRING HILL

SCHOOLS
MAGAZINE

A FOUNDATION
FOR GROWTH
PG. 8



AD SPACE



FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Spring Hill Schools educates more than 4000 students and approximately 125 are in the pre-kindergarten program for three and four-year-old children at the Spring Hill Early Learning Academy (SHELA). The pre-kindergarten program allows the students with the highest learning needs to get a head start on their educational journey. The pre-kindergarten program is not funded at the level of regular grades Kindergarten through Grade 12 but the long-term financial benefit is exponential.

Research studies indicate that early childhood education programs have at least a 4X-9X return on investment per dollar and not only benefit the health, education, and development of young children along with offering vital support to parents, a quality early childhood program also leads to increased earnings and employment in the future. In this issue is a feature article about SHELA and a link to a video that includes parent and teacher testimonials. It's our hope to expand this program in the coming years!

As the calendar has now turned to 2025, our high-quality schools continue to increase the number of students enrolled and also maintain high-quality educational programming evidenced by standardized state assessment results. When reviewing assessment data from Spring 2024 in Math, English/Language Arts, and Science there is much to be proud of.

As a district, our 'brick-n-mortar' students that attend our on-site schools, performed well. To put that performance into perspective, consider that when looking ONLY at the percentage of students that scored at the HIGHEST TWO LEVELS (3 & 4 - Advanced and Proficient), our District Average compared to ALL 286 public school districts across Kansas, Spring Hill Schools ranked:

- English Language Arts; 12th out of 286 Districts = 96%
- Math: 15th out of 286 Districts = 95%
- Science: 35th out of 286 Districts = 95%

Our staff work hard daily to put our students in the best position to experience success and the results indicate that the students' daily hard work pays off!

As always, feel free to reach out to me anytime with thoughts or questions.

Best wishes for a great 2025!

Link W. Luttrell

Link W. Luttrell, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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Cover Photo: 2 children learn using flashcards at the Spring Hill Early Learning Academy. (Photo by Samantha Bishop).

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GISSEL MCDONALD:



Gissel McDonald, Spring Hill High teacher.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

By Dylan Estes, SHHS Journalist

"My first impression of her was that she's really enthusiastic and quite loud, but it was a nice change of pace, she brought in a lot of energy to the class and it's easy for a teacher to stop there with all that flair, but she actually knew what she was doing," Kathlyn Tran, former student, senior, said.

"She was the crazy teacher, because she was coming in—not yelling— but she's loud. When we had learned stuff [in Honors Chemistry] and weren't getting it, she'd come in and explain it and it was like, 'oh!'...and you'd get it right away," Jack Janovick, former student, senior, said.

Gissel McDonald, the high school's current AP Chemistry teacher, is renowned by many students as one of the best teachers in the district. But, that's not where her story starts.

McDonald's first experience teaching AP Chemistry was out at a high school in Oklahoma. Just before her second year at that high school, the chemistry teacher was laid off, and because McDonald has a minor in chemistry, she was thrust into the job mere days before students would walk the halls.

"It was through that year that the lightbulb went off and for the first time I understood chemistry to the point that I started to fall in love with it," McDonald said.

Her favorite concept to teach, the one she is most passionate about, comes at the end of third quarter.

"Acids and bases!" McDonald exclaimed. "I love the feeling when I teach really hard content and kids grasp it and start to feel like 'oh my gosh, look at what I just learned, look at what I'm able to do, look at how hard this is and I'm able to nail it,'" McDonald said.

McDonald's clear passion for chemistry is just one of the many reasons her students speak of her class so highly. Her philosophy on teaching encompasses more than just getting better, though.

She gives credit to the high school's robust honors chemistry program for preparing students with prior knowledge and the rigor of an advanced class.

"Part of my success is a really tight-knit team of science teachers that we have here, we all support each other, and the district is really supportive. I'm able to do a lot of

the cool stuff that I do because they're super supportive. That's important and it shouldn't be overlooked," McDonald said.

McDonald believes that because chemistry is often so abstract, breaking it down for students is important. She reflects with her students on the questions she believes they need to ask themselves in the process of solving a problem. When McDonald is unable to teach a certain concept well, she finds other resources that can help students.

"Having a good teacher...you can think more critically, because you know that she can answer your questions. [When] you ask her questions that she doesn't really know the answer to, she'll be like, 'I'm going to marinate on that one,' and then she'll come back to you and have this really good, fleshed-out answer." Jack Janovick, senior, said.

McDonald has taught AP Chemistry every year it has been available at the high school, and every year over 90% of her students have passed the test in May, a figure that is well above both state and national averages. However, uniquely, McDonald treats the success of her class like a sports team, not an average grade or a passing rate.

"How does a coach get a team to be productive? You have to get everyone to buy into the goal. I want everyone to believe that they can pass the AP test in May. The 'productive struggle' is just as important as a test score is." McDonald said.

"I think students often expect school to be easy and when it gets hard they want to quit, but I'm trying to show kids that you can, and you will eventually, struggle through content. I want kids to learn how to struggle, but I want them to do that in a safer environment, which is my classroom, versus a lecture hall of 400 people in college," McDonald said.

"Your identity does not come in your grade. You're way more than what a GPA says, you're way more than what an AP or ACT score says," McDonald said.

McDonald's passion for teaching showcases one of the many examples in the district of teachers who truly care about the success of their students.

"I love it. It's the happiest part of my day," McDonald said.

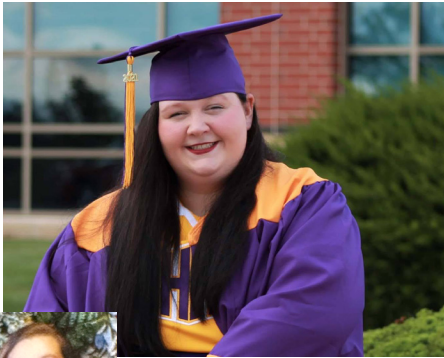


ABOUT THE JOURNALIST

I'm a junior and this is my second year in SPUB! I'm the galleries manager and the data manager this year. I do SPUB because I love to design and photography, but I also love meeting people and hearing their stories and what they have to say. Everybody has something worth sharing!

AD SPACE

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



**Emily
Noll**

2021

I attended Fort Scott Community College for two years, on a cheerleading scholarship, and received an Associates of Science Degree. I currently work at SHHS as a Life Skills Paraprofessional and a Life Skills Cheer Coach.

I have always known that I wanted to be a teacher in Spring Hill Schools someday, but until I am finished with college I decided to be a para!

My 6th grade social studies teacher, Mr. Carter, inspired me to become a teacher. I had always wanted to be a teacher but I had thought of other professions. Mr. Carter was the teacher that made me realize teaching was what I was meant to do. I originally wanted to teach 6th grade Social Studies because of him but after having Mrs. Higgs in high school, and a few other amazing science teachers at Fort Scott Community College, I decided to go to school to become a biology teacher.

What advice would you give current students, especially those interested in education?

Go for it! I already know that I want to be a teacher but being a para has just shown it more than ever!

I went to Kansas State University and graduated in 2016 with a B.S. in Animal Science and Industry with a focus in Biotechnology. I went back in 2018 and earned a M.A. in Teaching. I'm currently a Biology/Chemistry/Intro to Healthcare Teacher at Spring Hill High.

Spring Hill has always been home and has a reputation for having a great district. I love that it still has a small town feel even though it has grown so much since I graduated.

As a student I worked really hard in school to do well and be involved. However, as I grew and went through college, I realized that school isn't just about getting good grades. Instead it's about learning the process of learning and understanding information that is going to carry me through life. To me it is about being a life-long learner and understanding the world around you.

What advice would you give current students, especially those interested in education?

Don't let other people talk you out of what makes you happy and the careers you're interested in. I wanted to teach when I was a senior in high school, but allowed family and friends (not teachers) to talk me out of it for various reasons. Stay true to yourself and your passions. Also, start networking and developing relationships now and maintain them.



**Taylor
Harrison**



2012

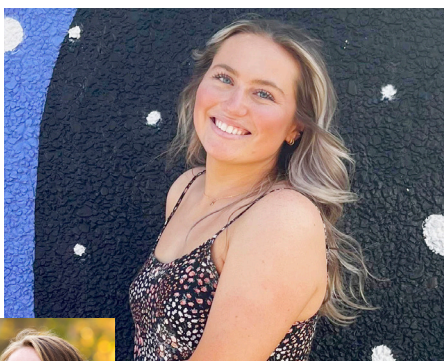
I went to college at the University of Saint Mary! My degree is in English. I currently teach 7th and 8th grade ELA at Forest Spring Middle School, and I coach wrestling at Spring Hill High School.

Since becoming an educator, my perspective on teaching has changed tremendously. I never fully grasped how much work teachers do just to prepare for a single day of school, but I can't imagine there are many careers out there that are more rewarding.

Tucker Woofert, who I get to coach wrestling with now, was a huge part of why I wanted to become a teacher. He made me want to work with kids and be the person for them that he was for me. Even now in my adult life, I know that I'll never have to go through anything alone because I have him (and his family).

What advice would you give current students, especially those interested in education?

I learned a lot about education before I started teaching just by having conversations with people who had experience in the field. Get your substitute teacher license if you are old enough and spend some time in the classroom! It will open your eyes to a lot of things.



**SHANNON
STOVALL**

2018

AD SPACE

A Foundation for Growth Spring Hill Early Learning Academy



By Chris Olsen, SHS District, Digital Communications Specialist

For many families in Spring Hill, the Spring Hill Early Learning Academy, affectionately known as "SHELA," represents more than just a preschool. It's a nurturing community that prepares young children for kindergarten and life beyond, providing individualized support and a wealth of opportunities. It is also the early start of the Bronco journey in the Spring Hill School District.



A teacher helps a student learn at the Early Learning Academy.

A Unique Beginning

Established as part of the Spring Hill School District, the Early Learning Academy is in the heart of this rapidly growing Kansas community of Spring Hill. SHELA is a lot of things to many people, but its core mission is to provide a play-based curriculum that integrates academics with social, emotional, and behavioral learning.

"Our goal is kindergarten readiness," said Principal Shannon Fanning. "We want students to not only have an academic foundation but also develop socially and emotionally."

Fanning, who joined the academy in the Fall of 2024, immediately noticed the warmth and professionalism of her staff. "What stood out was how friendly everyone is—from the staff to the families," she said. "We have a dedicated team that includes teachers, therapists, and special education professionals. Together, they ensure every child's individual needs are met."

Comprehensive Support and Inclusion



The academy offers multiple entry points for students, including peer models, special education services, and state-supported at-risk programs. "We have monthly screenings called Child Find to help families understand if their child is meeting developmental milestones," Fanning explained. "Whether through a peer model or needing

extra support, there's a place for every child here." The academy also provides a variety of services, from occupational and speech therapy to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). These resources have had a profound impact on families like that of the Jillian Butts family, whose son Billy, diagnosed with autism, has thrived since joining SHELA.

"Billy has made so much progress," said Jillian Butts. "He walks into school with confidence and comes home with a smile. The staff here feels like family."

A Growing Legacy

The growth of Spring Hill has mirrored the expansion of the Early Learning Academy. Carly Roberts, an Occupational Therapist with over a decade of experience in the district, described the community's ongoing support as a cornerstone of SHELA's success.

"Spring Hill is one of the fastest-growing districts in the state," Roberts said. "Families move here because they know about our excellent schools. At SHELA, we maintain a strong family feel despite the growth."

Parents Speak Out

Parents frequently share stories of their children's transformation thanks to the academy. For Kendra Miller, whose children attended SHELA, the experience was transformative.

"My son, who had delays, grew leaps and bounds here," Miller said. "The staff's dedication and the structured, supportive environment gave him confidence and skills he carries into kindergarten."

Looking Ahead

Fanning emphasizes the importance of retaining its small-town feel while adapting to the community's needs as the academy continues to grow. "We want to ensure every child has access to rich opportunities while maintaining the personal connections that make SHELA special," she said.



Shannon Fanning, Early Learning Principal

The academy's doors are always open to new families, offering flexibility in enrollment and a welcoming environment for all. "We encourage anyone with questions or concerns to reach out," Fanning said. "This is a great place to be."

For more information about the Spring Hill Early Learning Academy, visit their website or contact their office directly.



**SCAN TO LEARN MORE
AND WATCH A VIDEO
ABOUT THE EARLY
LEARNING ACADEMY!**

TRAILBLAZING EDUCATION

SOPHOMORES THRIVE IN AP EUROPEAN HISTORY'S FIRST YEAR

By Holly Lichtenauer, SHHS Journalist

Last year, the USD 230 District introduced the AP European History course which is also available for sophomores. The high school offers other college classes for upperclassmen, but last year was the first opportunity for sophomores to take a challenging class. Hailey Bachura was the only teacher who taught this new curriculum.



"In order to teach AP, you have to go to a week-long course training with a professor where they have been teaching for 20 years. He [the professor] scored the AP exam and had a lot of experience so I took a lot of what he did and did research to educate myself," Bachura said.

Past and current students have learned vital skills they can apply into their other courses.

"Taking AP Euro helped me understand how AP classes are structured because they are a lot different than general classes. It helped me learn writing skills, study skills, and comprehension of history opposed to memorizing facts," Channing Kice, junior, said.

A current student taking AP explained how Bacura makes the class less overwhelming.

"The way she lays out her class makes it easy to manage and makes the work a lot more digestible. The online writing portions make it accessible to look back at my work to improve," Hayden Whim-Alber, sophomore, said.

Whim-Alber explained how they were nervous taking a college class as a sophomore, but they have felt more comfortable with Bacura's assignments and guidance.

"I thought it was going to be a lot more difficult than it already is. I was scared of going into it at first, especially the big test at the end. The way she lays out her class makes it easy to manage and makes the work a lot more digestible," Whim-Alber said.

Students from last year scored an average of 81%, 10% higher than the national average. Statics reflect Bacura's ability to step into a new position and set her students up for success.



"It felt amazing to see the results and I was proud of my kids for sticking with me, especially that I was on maternity leave. It was more impressive that they were able to persevere," Bacura said.



ABOUT THE JOURNALIST

I'm Holly Lichtenauer and this is my first year in SPUB! I wanted to do SPUB because I love writing and I want to be a journalist in the future! I'm most excited to just be a part of this team and start working! Journalism matters to me so much because I believe everyone has a story that should be heard and recognized among peers.



Beneath the Rising Sun: Brooklyn Sherron

By Hannah King, SHHS Journalist

As high schoolers reach the middle of the year, many juniors are contemplating schedules for next year, what clubs to be a part of, and starting their searches for the next steps in their academic life. Brooklyn Sherron, junior, has been doing just this and more.

Last March, as a sophomore at Spring Hill High School, she found an opportunity within the FFA program that she could not pass up. This opportunity would mean she could endure a process that included an application, interview, and a speech that could allow her to become a district officer.

Sherron currently serves as her FFA chapter's president, and at the time of her application, she was serving as the secretary. Sherron saw a need in her FFA district that reached well beyond herself. While balancing school, golf team, farm work, and her Christian faith, Brooklyn readily submitted her application, inspired by her two older sisters with a goal to serve the 35 schools that create the East Central District.

"I wanted to be a district officer because I saw it as an opportunity to increase involvement throughout our district. I wanted to help everyone find their place in FFA so they could reap the benefits that come through this experience. The impact I have felt from my time in FFA is something I love being able to share and influence within others," Sherron said.

Peyton Sherron and Alyssa Sherron, Brooklyn's sisters, are both SHHS and FFA Alumni. They both served as the East Central District presidents during their time in high school, making Brooklyn's success a family tradition. Brooklyn reached out to her sisters through each part of the election process for advice and support.

"My older sisters inspired me to become a district officer after I watched the impact they made from their time as district officers. I saw them grow as people throughout their time in FFA. They worked to make a positive impact on our district that I hope to also achieve," Sherron said.

Both sisters fostered a hankering for leadership within Brooklyn. This helped Brooklyn surpass the interview process with ease, earning her a spot on the presidential slate. This meant that Sherron would have to write, memorize, and deliver a speech over why she values leadership that would convince delegates from each school

in the East Central district that she was worthy of the position of District President. Brooklyn worked closely with her sister Peyton during this part of the process, to curate a speech that accurately represented her values and goals for this district. Sherron gave a descriptive speech about her experience participating in mutton busting. She described how her experience tackling the determined sheep taught her to never give up. She delivered the speech with perfection at the East Central District Banquet earning her the spot of District President.

Since then she has led her district officer team through the process of planning Greenhand Conference, a huge event that gathers all new FFA members and teaches them about traditions, expectations, and FFA rules. She also attended the District Officer Conference over the summer and hosted a workshop with her officer team at the State FFA Convention. There is much more in store for her and her team this year as they plan events to unite the district, and she is eager to lead through every step of the way.

"Leadership is the act of positively influencing others and working with them to reach their goals. At times you have to push people to be their best, hold them accountable, listen as well as lead, and know when to let someone else take the reins. You must be a good follower to be a good leader. Working to help others find their success and putting their needs above yours is a large part of being an empowered leader," Sherron said.

The district is excited to support her through her journey while she represents both SHHS and USD230 on this level as Sherron advocates for agriculture and leads students from all across Kansas to be the best version of themselves. Sherron will be stationed beneath the rising sun on the chapter level until June and on the district level until March.



Sherron poses with Hannah King, senior, at their FFA chapter banquet after finding out that both SHHS students were elected for district office. (Photo provided by Hannah King)



ABOUT THE JOURNALIST

I love serving the people of my community. Journalism is a powerful resource to inform the public and encourage growth within the community. As a senior I am the Lead Senior Ads Manager for the Bronco Yearbook. I love using my platform to support what I value and to amplify the voices of Spring Hill.

AD

SPACE

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SCAN
ME



HEADSPACE

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The “State of the District Breakfast”

By Norah McMains, SHHS Journalist

On October 15th, the annual State of the District Breakfast was held. This year, it took place at the Meadowlark Event Center. This event had a slightly different goal than it has had in previous years. This year, B.J. Harris, SHEF Executive Director, described his vision for the breakfast.

“[This year] we really took an approach of making it feel like a thank you to our supporters. I think in the past it has been more of a target of looking to actually raise money at that event. Obviously we were still looking to do that because we are a fundraising organization, but I really wanted to make the event feel like it was a celebration of the past years, a celebration of what we’ve got coming in the future, and really to showcase students and put the kids out in front of the community,” said Harris.

The celebration theme was evident through the many performances and involvement of students from various Spring Hill schools. SHHS culinary classes prepared and served desserts for the attendees to enjoy while watching the performances and listening to outstanding speakers. These tasty delights included lemon bars, brownies, and small tarts. The SHHS theater department performed a short portion of a song from their upcoming musical “Beauty and the Beast.” Members of the cheer teams from all three middle schools came together to do their routine, and the Dazzler dance team lived up to their name, dazzling the crowd with their routine. The SHHS choir awed the audience with their rendition of “Corner of the Sky”.

“These art students, they don’t always get a chance to get in front of the community, and this was really a community event, certainly with community leaders in the room. I really wanted them to see the talent we have at Spring Hill schools, see the type of kids that were putting out,” remarked Harris.

Despite the new approach to the event, the fundraising aspect of the event from years past remained a factor in the way Harris organized it.

“I think that if the donors see how dynamic and creative and talented our students are, they’re just gonna be that

Culinary Arts students serve desserts to attendees.



Students from Spring Hill High perform “Be Our Guest” at the 2024 Breakfast.

much more likely to support the initiatives that we have going on. I think the goal of putting the students out in front and letting them do their thing left the people that were in attendance over breakfast feeling energized and positive about Spring Hill schools,” said Harris.

The fundraising from these events will be used for a variety of causes, all under the umbrella of grants and initiatives for the district schools.

“The event had a specific fundraising initiative which was to specifically go toward our teacher excellence grants, our building grants, and to classroom grants that we’ve been doing in the past,” said Harris.

The SHEF is planning another fundraising event in the near future: the SHEF Spring Soiree. The soiree will be geared more towards the individuals in the community rather than local and corporate businesses for fundraising.

“The breakfast we feel was kind of a nice “thank you” to our corporate partners, and we have our SHEFtember campaign and our golf tournament. [These] are all kind of focused on the business community. We were looking for something that could engage the community at large: the families and the people that individually want to support Spring Hill schools, not just the businesses but the actual individual patrons,” Harris said.

March 8, 2025 will be the first ever SHEF Spring Soiree. It will be a fancy affair with dinner and dancing. There will be a silent auction, live auction, and sponsorship opportunities available at that event. Registration information is available at usd230.org/shefevents.



ABOUT THE JOURNALIST

Journalism is something I have always loved to explore, whether that be reading local newspapers/stories or editing anything I can get my hands on. Everyone deserves to be heard, and everyone needs to listen to each other.

AD SPACE

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